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JUNIA

A NOVEL

BY THE AUTHOR OF 'ESTELLE RUSSELL,' 'THE PRIVATE LIFE OF GALILEO,' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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JUNIA.

CHAPTER I.

At the corner of Bow Street Junia encountered Mrs Marville.

"What now?" was that lady's address. "You have been crying your eyes out. Don't tell me!"

"I could not help it," said Junia, humbly.

"Don't say that. How can you be so inconsistent? Did I not tell you I wanted you to come with me to a theatrical agent to-day? What do you suppose he will think of you?"

"Perhaps he will not notice how I am looking," said Junia. Mrs Marville put aside the suggestion as not worth contradiction.

She took Junia to the shop of a friend of hers, a lady in the theatrical boot and shoe line, and, retiring to the small parlour behind, she bade Junia sit down. Then, drawing from her pocket a square of white tulle, a piece of rag, and two small boxes containing cosmetics, she proceeded to "make up" Junia's face for daylight.

"You will have to give a name," she said, when she had finished her manipulations, and the square of white tulle was fastened round Junia's face and bonnet. "You went away in such a hurry this morning that I forgot to tell you to think of one. What do you say to a foreign name! Berringtoni sounds pretty well, I think."

"I don't think it would do at all," said Junia, scarcely able to repress a smile at the grotesque sound, though her heart was so heavy.

"Well, then, what do you say to Orkini? It should be something ending in an *i* or an *o*. I know that, though I haven't got the languages like you."

"I will think of a name as we walk," said

Junia. But it was not so easy to think. For she could only remember the names of various Italian acquaintances, and she shrank from assuming a name which she knew to belong to somebody else. At the last moment, when they were ascending the stair leading to the agent's office, Junia remembered a nickname which Carlo had given her, because of a fancied resemblance in her face to the face of Carlo Dolce's angel.

Would Carlo remember that? Would it help him to find her out, if he indeed cared to find her out and ask her again to be his wife? "Oh, if he would but come now—now!" thought Junia, as she gave her name to the agent.

"Angiola Gabriele."

The agent, struck more by the foreign accent with which the words were pronounced than by the words themselves, inquired—

"You're foreign, eh?"

"English mother; father a foreigner," said Mrs Marville promptly, seeing that Junia was taken aback by the unexpected question.

Bending towards the agent, she said privately—

"My pupil that I was telling you of. Plenty of raw material there, eh, sir?"

"Plenty of appearance, ma'am, at any rate; that's easy to see," was the audible answer. Junia, who knew well enough by this time what was meant by appearance, blushed beneath her rouge.

"Miss Angela Gabrielli," said the agent, writing the name down in his book. "That's it. Hope to hear of something to suit you shortly. No young lady could be under better tuition than Mrs Marville's. Good morning."

"Now then, said Mrs Marville, in high good-humour at the agent's compliment, "I should like to know why you came back looking so woe-begone; because I warn you that sort of thing won't do. I can't have you getting wrinkles. And that's all you get by giving way to trouble; wrinkles and a cracked voice—that's all."

Junia remembered Anna's injunction that

she was not to speak of her. "My family have cast me off," she said.

"Ha! Because of your profession, I suppose. Well, my love, I honour you for not knuckling down to them."

"But I deserve no such honour, for I would willingly have obeyed them, only we could not agree as to the manner of my obedience."

"Never mind. In ten years' time you'll be riding in your own carriage," said Mrs Marville, confidently. "And then see if they won't be glad to know you, that's all!"

Junia smiled bitterly at Mrs Marville's comfort. No ultimate success of hers, she knew full well, would bring Anna back to her. It was with a heavy heart that she listened to Mrs Marville's plans for the future. She had striven to be upright in all her dealings, to flee from the first appearance of evil. Yet by her own sister she was condemned to be henceforth as though she had fallen to that lower depth which lies below starvation and the stage. As she entered the theatre that night, it seemed to her that over the doorway might

be written—"*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi che entrate.*"

Nor was Anna, sitting in Mrs Odynell's magnificent drawing-room, less miserable in her heart than was Junia, though her face was wreathed in smiles, and the man whom she loved so truly was seated by her, showing by his demeanour that his saintly character was no hindrance to his being most secularly in love. For once in her life, Anna found herself at fault. She had not believed it possible that her sister should prove so stubborn in her ideas of right and wrong. According to Anna's creed—the creed of a woman of the world, but not of a worldly woman—she would have said—there was no such thing as absolute right or absolute wrong. Each was modified by circumstances. To act as Junia was acting was to Anna's mind as suicidal as for a pilot to steer a boat on a hitherto unseen rock, because the course indicated by the chart happened to be right over it. Junia was good, unselfish, high-toned in mind. But this one quality of stubbornness would for ever ren-

der useless all the fine qualities she possessed. What could be done with such unpliable people in a world like this? Anna asked herself, in utter dismay at the pass to which Junia had brought herself. From a pass like this there was but one escape. If Junia were to die!

CHAPTER II.

BROKEN-HEARTED at the rupture with her sister, Junia became a mere automaton in Mrs Marville's hands. At Longbeach, the little watering-place to which she went with Mrs Marville at the beginning of the summer season, there was no time either for retrospect or regret. Morning, noon, and night, Junia was learning her business at a small dirty theatre where Mrs Marville, thanks to her long connection with the "Royal and National Amalgamated," drew a salary of two pounds, and her *protégée*, as one of the useful people, a salary of fifteen shillings, a-week. Here nobody was unkind to Junia. Compared with her life at Nunehead, the snubs and slights she received here were very few and far between. She was placed too low to excite

jealousy; and she might, if left to herself, have gone on contentedly for years, playing such parts as fall to the lot of the theatre hack, in peace and goodwill to her world behind the scenes. But Mrs Marville ordained it otherwise.

One morning, Junia's attendance at rehearsal not being required, she remained at home to do some needlework for her friend. Their frugal dinner was already spread, when Mrs Marville entered, brandishing above her head one of those thin books, about the size of a religious tract, only with a bright instead of a sad coloured wrapper.

"A part for me to write out?" Junia inquired.

Mrs Marville was enthusiastic. "A beautiful little part—a part that will be the making of you, my love," she cried. "If you don't make a hit with this, I'll never forgive you. See, now, it is a burlesque—the 'Diamond Mountain.' And you are to play one of the genii—the pretty one. Hurrah!"

The only burlesque Junia knew was Scar-

ron's 'Virgile Travesti.' She had not, indeed, read it through, but had restored it quickly to its place on the topmost shelf at her uncle's library, with a blush of shame at having opened it even in ignorance. She took the 'Diamond Mountain' from Mrs Marville, feeling prejudiced beforehand, though she did not venture to say so.

"I should be glad enough to make a hit," she said, fearing lest silence on her part might convert Mrs Marville's enthusiasm into ill-temper; "for then I should see my way to paying back all that I owe you."

"Hold your tongue! I wasn't thinking of that," said Mrs Marville. As Junia read the burlesque through, she was pleased to find that it was a very harmless one. There appeared nothing coarse set down for any of the characters to say or do. It was, indeed, very silly, — so silly that it made her yawn, and wonder whether the author himself had not yawned when he wrote it! But it was only silly; and with a feeling of relief Junia turned to the first page to see what her dress would be.

Then, for the first time, she raised her voice in protest.

"Mrs Marville, I won't wear a dress like this!"

"What now?" said Mrs Marville, who was still busy over her dinner.

"Read it yourself and see. I might as well be a ballet-girl at once!" said Junia, with a voice full of scorn. And she laid the book down on the table as if there was not a word more to be said on the subject.

Mrs Marville (with a marrow-bone in her hand) looked at Junia, admiring her attitude. What an admirable Offended Diana she would make in a *tableau!* the good woman thought. Then she said, composedly, "'You can't' and 'you won't' are words which have no meaning on the stage. You ought to know that by this time. I say you shall and you will. Had it not been for the dress that part would not have been given you. I dropped a hint to the manager when I found this piece was to be put up for rehearsal. 'Mr Jones,' says I, 'Miss Gabrielli is the only lady in the com-

pany who possesses anything to speak of in the way of a leg, present company always excepted.' Mr Jones, like a wise man, took the hint. He thought, as I did, that 'twas a pity your lights—your legs, that is—should be kept under a bushel any longer. Why, Angela, my love, you ought to be dancing for joy, instead of sitting there ready to cry. Your dress is the most picturesque in the whole piece."

"That may be; but ah! how can I wear it? Mrs Marville, can you imagine a modest woman wearing such a dress?"

Mrs Marville fixed her sharp black eyes on Junia. "I have worn a dress much like that in my time; and I think I'm a modest woman, notwithstanding."

"I know you are," said Junia, hastily, while a deep blush overspread her cheeks. "But—circumstances forced you to wear it, perhaps. I won't believe you liked it. I won't believe that if you had had a brother, you would have liked him—or any one whom you loved—to see you in it any more than I should."

Mrs Marville reflected for a moment. "I was forced to wear it, just as you will be forced to wear this. And I liked it—after a while—just as you will like yours."

"Never!" said Junia, with a gesture of supremest disdain. Then, suddenly changing her voice and manner to one of entreaty: "Mrs Marville, if my brother June saw me in such a dress, I think he would be ready to kill me!"

"Then let your brother June take you home to live with him."

"That he would, if he could; but he has hard work to get on himself, yet."

"Then he has no business to criticise. Now look here, Angel. There's Fitzjames and Villiers both envying you your part, and on the look-out for a failure. I have guaranteed your performing the part creditably, and if it turns out that you are over-weighted, the governor will blame me."

At any other time this argument would at once have vanquished Junia's opposition. Now, it stimulated it.

"I'll go myself to Mr Jones, and ask him to give the part to Miss Fitzjames or whomever else he pleases."

"And ruin your prospects, and make me look like a fool!" cried Mrs Marville, in a violent passion. "One word more, and I'll shake this nonsense out of you. Where's your common-sense? Don't you know that you're in a profession where your legs and arms help to make money, just as much as your tongue and your pretty face? Your success or failure will make all the difference between my paying my rent and my not paying it this winter. There! Will that cure your squeamishness?"

Junia was silenced, but the squeamishness was not cured. Outwardly quiescent, she still protested inwardly against this combination of circumstances which seemed to be pushing her downwards, slowly but surely, and making reunion with Anna more than ever impossible. She could discern no way of escape. But, believing as she had read and heard, that "man's extremity is God's opportunity," she

betook herself to prayer. As day after day passed, each day bringing the ordeal of a first representation nearer, she besought with added fervour that this cup of humiliation might pass from her. How it was to pass she knew not, nor troubled herself to know, or devise what means God might use for her deliverance. She simply prayed—in what agony, with what clinging faith, only those gentle shrinking souls can tell who have been in a like extremity.

CHAPTER III.

On the night of the first performance of the "Diamond Mountain," Mrs Marville, for the first time, chose to recognise the imperfectly concealed dislike and distress of her pupil at the idea of taking a part in what she felt to be an unfeminine, shameless costume. "Poor thing!" she thought, remembering, with an effort, her own girlhood; "she's been brought up so soft and delicate. If she'd been getting her bread from the age of fourteen, as I was forced to do, she wouldn't be so particular about an inch of petticoat, more or less. Lor', now, if I had had such a chance as this, and such a noble figure as hers, I'd have jumped out of my skin with joy!"

"'Tis more of a part than you have had yet; but don't be anxious," she said, assuming that

Junia must feel some anxiety, though she had expressed none. "Sit quiet, my love, as soon as you're dressed, and keep your mind fixed on your first scene. And oh, my lovey, my angel!" she whispered—for the dressing-room was rapidly filling—"you will do your best, won't you?—for my sake as well as your own. I want to be proud of my handsome pupil. And then—the rent, love,—remember the rent for next winter."

As the awful moment approached, Junia steeled herself to meet what she believed to be her fate with at least outward bravery. Nevertheless, when she thought of the fervent prayer of all those days past—unanswered, disregarded—the cry rose from the depths of her heart, "Hath God forgotten?" A long pent-up sigh would have its way—the only possible expression of the profoundest discouragement Junia had yet known. And this sigh went to the heart of little Jemmy Bunce, the prompter, who took a part whenever required, and who now stood before her, dressed in such a hideous disguise as the First Magi-

cian that Junia did not recognise him till he spoke.

"Don't be nervous," he said, good-naturedly.

Junia started. "I did not know it was you, Mr Bunce."

He took it as a compliment. "Ain't it a capital make-up? But your part is a sweet one. And you're looking—stunning. You'll take the shine out of Fitzjames and the whole lot. Now then! that's your cue! on with you!"

Long afterwards, when Junia had attained the luxury of a cheval-glass, she wondered, not that she did not pass unnoticed, but that she did not attract even more notice from the audience. As it was, with only a subordinate part to play, she got a reception so warm that it frightened her and made her heart beat, while it filled the leading lady and low comedian, then on the stage, with anger and disgust.

For the first few moments all Junia's self-control was needed to keep her from rushing off behind the scenes. She was conscious of

Jemmy Bunce's voice behind her, prompting the lines which remained stuck in her throat. Whether she got them out or not, she never knew. Presently Jemmy himself came on as the First Magician, and Junia became for the next few moments a bystander, placing herself in an attitude of repose in which she had been carefully trained by Mrs Marville.

As she stood grasping convulsively the wand on which she was supposed to be leaning with graceful ease, she became conscious that every man in the theatre was staring at her—examining her—as if she were an animal put up for sale. Then the ground seemed to give way beneath her feet, and the whole house to become a cloud in which she could distinguish nothing except opera-glasses and eager eyes turned full upon her; towards which she in her turn was irresistibly compelled to look. Each glance of all those eager eyes felt like a buffet to her glowing cheeks. Every tradition of shrinking, maidenly, high-bred dignity seemed outraged, and Junia's inmost soul rose in bitter scorn and

indignation; while her self-possession gradually returned. She longed for those heads to have but one neck, and for her tinselled wand to become an axe. But, no sooner had the wish—as futile as it was foolish—formed itself in her mind, than the sense of justice which she possessed (more, perhaps, than most women) asserted itself, and told her that the gazing, gaping crowd, having paid its money, had the right to look and be satisfied—that the authors of her present misery and humiliation must be sought farther back. Had Mr Percy Smith been a little more considerate, a little more respectful; had Miss Kate Smith been more kind, more merciful in her judgment, less apt at the mysterious hinting of evil things, how different would Junia's position have been now! That trifle, that little cloud "no bigger than a man's hand" — a mere kiss — stolen against her will, had put her here, on the boards of the Longbeach theatre, in a dress which she would rather die than be seen in by Carlo or June.

"There is no such thing as a trifle in this world," Junia thought, as she stood waiting for the fall of the curtain, burning, shivering, burning again, under the fire of those pitiless eyes. Then a longing for revenge rose in her heart—for revenge against the careless ones "who did not consider the poor"—a longing such as could never be assuaged, she felt, her whole life through. It seemed not unholy. Had not God forgotten? Must she not henceforth fight her own battles?

Under the influence of this ungentle mood, Junia regained the self-possession which she had been within an ace of losing. She went through the next scene with credit to herself, and with a spirit quite different from her usual automaton-like precision. She looked and spoke and moved like one who had an end in view. When she came off the stage at the last scene, Jemmy Bunce noticed her altered demeanour.

"What possesses you to-night? You are looking anything but angelic, Miss Angela Gabrielli," said he.

Junia laughed and passed by.

Mrs Marville had her own opinion about Junia's success, but was too cautious to express it till she heard the manager's. Junia received no praise from her till the third night, when familiarity had taken off the edge of her disgust at her dress. Then, backed up by the manager, did Mrs Marville declare that the hit was made, and that her pupil had found her proper groove at last.

As death, and disease, and other things hideous, become less hideous in their aspect through familiarity, so, repeated night after night, did the once unutterably hateful become less hateful to Junia. She became conscious of the hilarious absurdity of the burlesque, lenient to the vulgarity of it. She began, gradually, to like her part, and to wish it were longer and more important. She was pleased at her nightly reception, and would have missed it keenly had it been withheld. She took to heart Mrs Marville's precept, that legs and arms should help to make money, as well as a pretty face. Why

not? Junia reasoned, the bloom being rubbed off the edge of that peach-like coyness which had hitherto enshrined her beauty. Where was the harm, if—a man looked? if fifty men looked? Must she not fight her own battle with such weapons as came to her hand? An Egyptian woman might have wept, perhaps, at the rending of her veil against her will, though nothing more than a sallow face was hidden behind, just as Junia had wept when Mrs Marville first made her try on her burlesque costume. Idle tears! Foolish squeamishness! She would not sell herself to the devil, not she; though she might for a season wear what was commonly supposed to be the devil's livery. No! The devil, so it seemed now to her, was something like the fire—a good servant, but a bad master. Did not vast numbers of respectable people (as Mrs Marville assured her) get their honest livelihood by such mouthing and posturing as this? So, as Mrs Marville brought her part after part to "understudy," she took them and learnt them with an eagerness

which her friend hailed as an augury of future success.

Gradually and cautiously Mrs Marville unfolded to Junia a plan which was to make both their fortunes. For beauty of outline and profusion of golden hair, Mrs Marville declared she had not in all her experience met with Junia's equal. Mr Jones's opinion corroborated hers. Mr Jones was of opinion that burlesque would, before long, carry everything before it. Arms and legs and golden hair were becoming the rage. Play-wrights and managers were studying Lemprière's Dictionary. The gods were coming down again in the likeness of men. Venus, Adonis, Apollo, and Company were to be reproduced *au naturel* (as far as could be without wounding the susceptibilities of the Lord Chamberlain).

While Junia studied her parts, Mrs Marville devised costumes, each one more striking than the last: always—poor woman!—with the fear of the Lord Chamberlain before her eyes. She wrote to a play-wright in London to

furnish her with an original burlesque, of which she herself (with the aid of Lemprière) made the skeleton plot. In this burlesque, Junia was to play Venus, she herself, Jupiter. Thanks to her own natural gifts, Junia, with her aid, was shortly to inaugurate a new era in the drama.

The London play-wright filled up the skeleton as directed. Mrs Marville vowed the burlesque was a lovely one, and did not grudge a penny of the twenty pounds it cost her.

"It's perfectly full of puns; and it will keep the gallery in a roar from the first act to the last."

"Puns! Yes. I wonder what Shakespeare would say to them?" said Junia.

"Shakespeare! Why, he wasn't above making a pun himself. Anyhow, he's played out. If he was to appear again, it would be to empty benches."

"The worse for the world," said Junia, "and the worse for me. Oh, if I could but play Queen Constance or Queen Katharine!"

"Well, I like playing to a full house, and

I'd prefer Jupiter here," said Mrs Marville, with her finger on the manuscript. "And I am sure," she said, with a tender corner in her heart for Junia's former squeamishness, "your part is modest enough, my angel. That is, of course, apart from your peculiar views."

"I shall never trouble you with my peculiar views again," said Junia. "I begin to understand that one must live. My educational prejudices are nearly gone, I think. If Venus doesn't dress like a Benedictine nun, I can't help it. I daresay the properest ladies in London won't mind looking at her — from behind their fans. What more, in this new era that you tell me is dawning, could a reasonable actress wish, or a reasonable Lord Chamberlain either?"

"To be sure," said Mrs Marville, whose mind was constantly fixed on the main point. "To get one's rent paid, and a trifle over to put by, is the great thing in this world. I'm glad to see you take up my view, because

before, I tell you plainly, you were standing in your own light. And oh, my goodness! what a weight is off my mind, when I think that now you are in a fair way to make money!"

Shortly before leaving London, Junia had had a letter from her brother in answer to her letters telling him of her difficulties, Anna's estrangement, and lastly, at her having gone upon the stage as a makeshift, no other employment being open to her. Junia had feared that her brother might blame her for the estrangement, though she had felt, while writing about it, that even if June himself had advised a course similar to that recommended by Anna, she should have acted precisely the same. June's letter, written at the post-office, where he had gone to fetch his sister's letters, was as follows:—

"I have just got three letters of yours; and one from Anna which has utterly amazed me. Brought up as we all were to love what was true and upright, I may well be amazed

that Anna should recommend dissimulation to you, and even insist on it as the price of her sisterly affection. I trust that no pressure of circumstances will ever induce you to lend yourself to any such baseness. Trust me, Junia, when I say that the love which can only be purchased at the price of falsehood, is a love not worth having. This sounds very hard, but I am sure of its truth. And I feel sure too, that Anna will one day bitterly repent what she has done. How she could have been so stupid—putting it on such low grounds—as to wish you to deceive uncle Odynell, I cannot think. How could she be sure that uncle Odynell never saw that letter of yours? or that aunt would not remember about the date and address and everything else in it? I do not feel at all so sure. On the contrary, I feel certain that she is the sort of person to have read your letter very attentively, and to remember perfectly all about it. People of violent temper have, as a rule, good memories for any topic connected with their

aversions; and you were one of her aversions, unfortunately. Anna desired me to make no answer to her letter. As she is by this time married, and as I do not wish to make mischief between her and her husband, I shall obey her, else I should certainly write and tell her my mind, and so end a correspondence which, on her side at least, I considered almost ended already, as I had not heard from her for nearly a twelvemonth before I got this letter. As to my not telling Edward, I do not feel sure what I might do were I in England. I think it very probable that I should tell him, and teach him to be proud, not ashamed, of his sister Junia. But the boy seems to have forgotten me altogether. He has only written to me once since I came out here, though I have written to him several times. One gets tired of this sort of thing at last. If he and Anna have never been able to find time for letter-writing, surely they might have sent me a newspaper now and then. But 'out of sight out of

mind.' That is one of the things we colonists have to put up with, and get used to as best we can.

"I was amazed—in a different way—at your last news of yourself. You, to be really, actually, on the stage! But why should you suppose yourself to be so entirely without aptitude? I do not see why in time you should not make a very good actress. I remember how you used to *feel* good acting—Ristori's in particular. And how you used to cry when our father read 'King Lear' or any of Shakespeare's tragedies to us! Anna used to look across the table at me, and smile at your emotion. I used to wonder at it sometimes, but perhaps it was because you saw further into the inmost soul of things than either she or I did. Keep me well posted as to your performances. I shall be delighted if your friend proves right and you wrong in this instance. Perhaps, after giving the thing a fair trial, you will find that you have at last discovered your true vocation. How I should

enjoy to see you play Portia! I am sure you would make a capital Portia. But if there existed an English setting of that gem 'The Antigone,' how would you play that—the girl who loved her brother so! Good-bye, my Junia, my English Antigone who loves her brother so."

CHAPTER IV.

THOUGH she prided herself on being a Church-woman, and considered Dissent "low," yet Mrs Marville never had made any pretence of being a church-goer. Going to church service she considered rather in the light of a relaxation than of a duty—a relaxation to be taken if convenient, and given up if not convenient. Sunday, in very truth, was a blessed and welcome day to the two hard-working actresses—a day when there was neither morning rehearsal nor evening performance. The mornings were generally spent in resting from the fatigues of the week, while the afternoons were devoted either to a trying-on of new costumes, or to a stroll on the beach or into the country. Junia had never made any remonstrance about this state of things. She did not, indeed, wish to

attend church herself now. To listen to the service would only produce painful workings of her mind—doubts, questionings, perplexities, which no living soul could answer, and which no written words could quell. Had she been a Roman Catholic, Junia would, long ere this, have unburdened her heavy mind to her director. As it was, she carried her burthen herself, sighing over it now and again in secret, —ay, weeping that the God whom she had loved, and tried (though feebly) to serve, should have left her prayer unanswered.

Half the summer was over, when Mrs Marville suddenly appeared conscious of the fact that, as a Churchwoman, she was bound to attend church sometimes, and that she had not been for many months. She looked critically at her bonnet. "'Tis shabby," she said; "but it will get shabbier still; and I'm sure I can't afford another till we go back to London. So come along, lovey; your bonnet's black, and black is always respectable."

Junia obeyed, unwillingly. They went through narrow winding streets and lanes to

an old church, standing in the midst of its churchyard on a hill in the oldest part of the town.

On entering, they were confronted by a yellow, sour-visaged pew-opener, who, with a glance at their bonnets, motioned them to the free seats. These stools of penitence were so placed that the sitters could by no possibility hear such gospel as might be preached. They could not kneel, much less sit back, or assume any attitude approaching to comfort. As a compensation for these drawbacks the seats commanded a view of the only stained window in the building. Junia, with a wry face at Mrs Marville, stuck herself on her narrow perch as best she might, and beguiled the time for a while by looking at the window, and at a queer old monument on the wall close by.

By-and-by the organ, behind the free seats, began to blare out, and the charity-school children, ranged on each side of it, to shriek, inharmoniously,—so much so, that Mrs Marville began to repent of having come to church, and would have retreated, only the narrow pew

was by this time quite filled up. Junia, resigned to the cacophony she could not escape, sat still in a half-stunned state, till a welcome lull came, and an unknown voice of fine quality began to read the first lesson. Junia had often heard that chapter in the Prophets—one of mingled sorrow and denunciation; but as she listened now, she felt she was seizing its real meaning for the first time. Mrs Marville's face was a study of rapt attention. What a thousand pities it was, she thought, that the possessor of such a voice was not making a fortune on the stage! Junia stood up when the lesson was over, and leaned forward, hoping to obtain a view of the reader. In a block of pews nearly at right angles with the free seats stood, looking towards the reading-desk, her sister Anna. The congregation rose at the first sentence of the *Te Deum*, and in an instant she was hidden. But Junia, who knew by heart every curve and line of her sister's face, needed no second look to assure her that Anna had found happiness. Heedless of the blaring and growling and squeaking, by means

of which the Longbeach folk offered their sacrifice of praise, Junia sat down and communed with her own thoughts. She, who somewhile had been at variance with God—who had ceased, for very discouragement, to worship Him who, as it seemed, in her need had shown Himself so far off—was able to give thanks, and feel pure joy and gratitude once more. For God had been good to Anna, whom she loved. He had remembered her, and given her pleasant paths to walk in; and, seeing that this was so, Junia felt less the bitterness of her own unanswered prayers. How much better, she thought—while grateful tears flowed unchecked—how much better, since it had not been God's will to smooth the path of both of them, that it should be she, the elder sister, to whose lot all the roughnesses and the buffetings had fallen! How would Anna, so tender and frail, have borne the neglect, the loneliness, cold, sickness, hunger, or even the hard work, which Junia had struggled through? How much better that she should be in her present place among the pariahs—

with a squat pillar obstructing the sound of the Word of Life—than that she should sit in a luxuriously-cushioned pew, with all soft appliances to coax her to pray, and think (oh, horrible!) of Anna, dead, because life had been too hard for her!

Junia sat still, content and glad once more. She did not see Anna's face again; but to know that she was present, within ten yards of her, was more happiness than she could have dreamed of since their miserable parting in Vere Street.

The service proceeded. Junia began to ask herself, How could the life of the mime, with its foolish talking and jesting, be reconciled with the life in Christ? Venus Kallipyge —the Genius of the "Diamond Mountain"— Diana the Huntress—what had the representative of these and such as these to do with Christ crucified?

Then the sweet accustomed words of invitation, spoken by the golden mouth of the unknown interpreter, came dropping one by one into Junia's weary heart, and melted the

last remnant of hardness. She no more said to herself, "God has driven me forth into the wilderness;" for Christ was calling, and she was forced to answer.

"Yes," she said in her heart, "I will cast away all anger—even rightful anger. I will forgive freely all my enemies. I will go and ask counsel of this man who has been reminding me that I belong to Christ's kingdom. Perhaps he will advise me how I may get my bread, so that I need never be ashamed or angry any more. Yes, I will drink of the Lord's cup once more."

So Junia thought; and those supreme outward necessities—the food and the rent and the clothing—were forgotten for a while. The sermon came. Not a word could be heard in the free seats; only distant mumblings; but it mattered little to Junia. The words of invitation were still sounding in her ears; she knew a table would be spread, and she was making ready to come—drawn towards it as sweetly, as surely, as the vapour is drawn up by the morning sun. Then there

was a stir and a silence, and the congregation knelt; a sign to the occupants of the free seats that the sermon was finished. Junia stood up and looked towards the place where she had seen Anna; but the people filed out of the narrow aisles, and she was not among them. Mrs Marville went out by the west door, and Junia followed. There was a great throng, and they were forced to wait in the porch. As they stood, Mrs Marville looked back into the church, and suddenly caught Junia's arm. "Look!" she whispered, "'tis Sacrament Sunday. I thought 'twas for next Sunday."

"In some churches," Junia whispered back, "there is Sacrament every Sunday."

Mrs Marville scarcely heeded her explanation. "My love," she said, with some agitation, "I'd like to stop now. Who knows what will happen before next Sunday?"

"Let us go in," said Junia. And they returned together into the church, just as the door was being shut.

There were but few people remaining. It seemed very good to these two workers to be,

as it were, shut in with God, away from the toiling and moiling for a little while. They were directed to a seat near the altar; the body of the church and the free seats were now quite empty.

It was the custom at Longbeach for the pew-opener to go to each pew and open the door when the turn came for the occupants to approach the Holy Table. Mrs Marville, agitated and trembling at an unaccustomed act which was, in some sense, a new part, taken with scant preparation, stood up to go as her turn came. Junia, calm with the joyful calm of one who has found the sweet old path once more, prepared to follow, but stayed a moment to replace on the desk a little book which had fallen and been trodden on by Mrs Marville. As she stepped into the aisle Anna stood opposite to her.

Anna was stepping from her place with eyes cast down; a sweet smile played on her lips; her clasped hands sparkled with rings. The sisters' eyes met; Junia's loving, beseeching—Anna's dilated with sudden surprise, and

fear, and anger. Reddening to the roots of her hair, she stepped back as though she would have retreated from her sister's sight. Then, with quick change of purpose, and a look at Junia, accompanied by a gesture which said, unmistakably, "Stand back!" she went past.

Junia sank to the ground and hid her face. Was it then denied her even to take a crumb from the same table as her sister? She crept back to the innermost corner of the pew, and remained crouched down, heeding neither prayer nor praise, till the service came to an end, and Mrs Marville's voice roused her from her miserable stupefaction.

The strangeness of Junia's demeanour she set down to fatigue. "I'm tired myself now, though it hasn't been longer than many and many a rehearsal; and I wouldn't have missed staying for anything. But a glass of water will set you to rights." And she asked the pew-opener, who was locking up the church, where she could get one.

She lived close by, the woman said, and

could give them one. Mrs Marville remarked, as they crossed the churchyard to her cottage, that the service was very long.

"Long!" the woman answered; "I should think it was. 'Twas not so in the old vicar's time. But la! the new parson ain't content with giving the Sacrament every blessed Sunday, but he wants to have all the pews pulled down, and free seats all through the church. All the parish is against him for that—churchwardens and all."

While speaking, the pew-opener led the way through a low cottage door into a decent room, where she bade them sit down. Junia went to the open window, which was full of flowering plants, and looked at them while she drank the water the woman presently offered her.

"There's the parson and his lady," the pew-opener said, as a lady and gentleman passed arm in arm. "They haven't been long married, they say. Folk like her—she's always about among the poor."

Junia looked out. Their backs were turned,

but in the Sunday stillness she heard Anna's voice say, "Darling, are you very much tired?"

And the reply came in the fine voice she had heard in church, "Not so much as I was last Sunday, love."

CHAPTER V.

All the way home Mrs Marville was loud in her regrets at having asked Junia to go to church. "I feel the reaction myself, now the excitement is over. But oh, that service was beautiful! I wouldn't have missed it for a week's salary. I declare I'm sorry I can't go to church every day. When I retire I will. But as for you, my love, you must have your day of rest. You shall stay in bed next Sunday, and I'll write to Mr Marsden to prescribe a tonic. And you shall begin to drink bottled stout. Not too much of it though, else you'll lose your beautiful figure; and then good-bye to making money."

"You need not be uneasy about me," said Junia. "What overcame me was the unex-

pected sight of my sister. That is a thing which will never happen again."

"Your sister here? Then depend upon it she'll be coming to try and persuade you to leave the stage, now that you really have made a hit. I wish she were a hundred miles off."

"There is no danger of her doing anything of the kind," said Junia. "I do not expect ever to speak to her, or even to see her again."

"Ah, wait till you've made a fortune, my love; then she'll acknowledge you and be proud of you. Wait and see."

"How long?" said Junia, humouring her. "Ten years?"

"Very likely. And what's ten years to you? You'll be still young and handsome, and able to enjoy life. Meanwhile, my love, you must put up with old Marville, who's as fond of you — already — as if you were her daughter."

Junia kissed her; and Mrs Marville thought she was comforted. But Mrs Marville herself was uneasy. Coming from a class which re-

gards the profession of the stage as a rise in life, she was unable to realise the feeling of the class to whom the great mass of actors and actresses are mere pariahs. Junia's sister might be angry, but she thought she was envious too; and envy would prompt her to persuade Junia to leave the stage; envy, because Junia was gifted with the power of doing what she could not do. Therefore, unknown to Junia, Mrs Marville began to make arrangements which should take them out of Longbeach as speedily as possible.

Junia, as soon as these arrangements were made known to her, became possessed by an uncontrollable desire to see Anna once more. On the last Sunday of their stay at Longbeach she broke away, regardless of Mrs Marville's entreaties, and went to the old church on the hill. She hoped that the dusk and a light rain which was falling would favour her seeing Anna unobserved. But, though she stood near the door and watched the congregation in, she did not see her. She waited, walking up and down the streets till

the service was over and the worshippers dispersed. Last of all, the clergyman whom she had seen walking with Anna on that Sunday morning went past, walking alone. Junia followed him at a little distance.

He went on, humming a hymn-tune to himself, till he came to a part of the town which was half street, half country. He stopped at the gate of an old ivy-covered house, and let himself in with a latch-key. Standing at the gate, in the shadow of the quickset hedge, Junia saw Anna's face for one instant at the window, and then at the open door. "I heard you coming, love," she heard her exclaim joyfully. Her husband bent down to kiss her, and the door was shut.

Presently a ray of light streamed from a chink in the window-shutter on the broad path. The top of the window was left open, and Junia could hear the mingled voices. Then the light vanished, the sound of a distant harmonium was heard, and Anna's voice singing Mozart's *Agnus Dei.* How long Junia remained at the gate she scarcely knew. But

at length she became conscious of a deeper repose stealing over the rural dwellings and the town below, and remembering that Mrs Marville would be anxious at her absence, she crept slowly homewards, weeping as she went.

On the Saturday following (after the last performance of the "Diamond Mountain") the two actresses packed their trunks, snatched a few hours' sleep, and were up and on their way to the railway station before daybreak on Sunday.

On the Sunday evening they came to a halt at Sheffield, the first town on the list of Mrs Marville's burlesque engagements. They were followed by Jemmy Bunce, the prompter, who had been tempted to become Mrs Marville's agent by the offer of a better salary than he could get at Longbeach. Mrs Bunce accompanied her husband as wardrobe-keeper. On the Monday evening Mrs Marville and Junia, in the respective characters of Jupiter and Venus, were eliciting shouts of applause in the novel burlesque "A Tiff in High Life."

CHAPTER VI.

In the pages of the 'Era,' in the accumulating pile of pink and yellow-covered play-books, with dates and names of towns scribbled on their pages, might be found the record of the next few years of Junia's life. Of the life intellectual, of artistic craving, no sign at all. Of the spiritual life, none.

Since that Sunday in Longbeach church Junia had never asked herself that supreme question: Can the life of the mime, with its foolish talking and jesting, be reconciled to the life in Christ?

For, as time went on, her common-sense gave her the answer. The two were irreconcilable. And while she had a body to be clothed and fed and sheltered, she must cling to the one and despise the other. Alas!

there was no new Gospel anywhere for burlesque actresses and ballet-dancers: only the World, the Flesh, and the Devil; God looking on meanwhile, not caring (as it seemed) whatever might be the outcome of the fight with these.

Such was the aspect of this present life to Junia; and at last she had steeled herself to a dumb acceptance of what seemed the inevitable conditions of her existence. Just so are frost and flood and storm accepted; the inevitable results of Nature's laws, not to be changed at any man's desire.

Mrs Marville tyrannised over her, cringed to her, scolded and flattered her by turns, and loved her not more selfishly than many women love their daughters.

Sometimes a letter came from Canada. Then Junia would be silent all day and play badly at night; and because of this Mrs Marville hated the sight of Canadian letters, and would have withheld them had she dared. But she did not dare. For now Junia was the first burlesque actress in the United

Kingdom; and though Mrs Marville might tyrannise over her, she knew that the tyranny must be exercised within certain bounds, else Junia might sever a connection which had proved a great gain to Mrs Marville herself.

It was always after the arrival of one of these Canadian letters that Mrs Marville thought it necessary to put forth her greatest powers of flattery. That Junia, the original and only Venus, should ever be dull and downcast, was one of those problems which there was no solving. "Seems as if people never could be content with their lot in life," Mrs Marville would say to herself. The best remedy she knew of was to read aloud the latest favourable *critique* on Junia's performance. "Dear me," she would say, with a satisfied glance at her pupil, "what a comfort it is to think how wonderfully you have made your way! From being respectable—which we always were, thank God!—we have got on to be comfortable; as comfortable, almost, as ever I care to be. And you—you'll be riding in your carriage by-and-by."

To ride in a carriage was Mrs Marville's *ne plus ultra* of life's aspirations and triumph. While Junia, with a keen recollection of last night's realistic performance, would be thinking, "If papa and mamma could see me, what would they say? Can the spirits of the dead tell what the living are doing? Surely not; else they must be miserable, I think. And June, always wanting to know when I am going to play Portia, and Queen Katharine, and the rest! Would he take the money I send him if he knew what sort of parts I play? I am glad he is in Canada; and Carlo—poor Carlo—in Italy; so that I am safe from seeing either. I would rather die than act Venus if they were in England. They would misjudge me, as all the world does. Ah me! 'Unique,' 'graceful,' 'elegant,' 'deafening applause,' say the dramatic critics. I wish that pit and boxes would hiss, and critics cry 'Shame.' I wish that vulgarity and materialism were out, and modesty and refinement were in. I wish that there were no such thing as a theatre in this world!"

Thus ran the current of Junia's thoughts whenever a Canadian letter or any chance circumstance reminded her of her family or of family associations. Otherwise the use which inevitably becomes a second nature, and that grim philosophy of acceptance which she had made her own, helped her to live through her life of outward glare, and inward dulness, and severance from all she loved best.

It was but natural that, behind the scenes, she should be credited with a vast deal more influence than she really possessed. The actress who could fill the theatre, who never failed to "draw" wherever she went, must of necessity be a great personage, thought the underlings. And many were the vain entreaties from such as these that she would use her influence with the manager in behalf of some female relative of the applicant. They did not believe her when she declared she could do nothing to help them. They called her mean and jealous behind her back!

"My whole ambition," said a dresser to her on one occasion, "is to see my daughter with

just such a spangled dress as you are wearing to-night, miss."

"God forgive the woman!" Junia cried. "If the girl were mine I would rather see her in her coffin!"

"Lor', miss, that you should say so! Why, she'd make a hundred times more money than she ever will by dressmaking."

The manager of the Longbeach theatre, hearing of Junia's fame, sought her out in a town in the north where she and her burlesque company were playing—for Junia was a star now, and travelled with a star company—and made her a solemn offer of marriage.

Junia rejected it with such scorn that Mrs Marville took her to task. "You ought to be proud," she said; "for he asked you, not only because he thought you a good investment, which of course you would be to any man now, but because he thought you such a respectable young lady, and wished to keep you so."

Junia was thinking, "And I am the same girl that Carlo loved!" But she said, "May I be grateful for his good opinion!"

"And more than that," Mrs Marville continued, "he would have taken you on a starring engagement to America. Think of that now! You'd have had an agent—such an agent!—and paid no percentage."

Whenever Mrs Marville began to argue, Junia made her answer so as to humour her as much as possible. In this way she was able to live with less wear and tear to nerves and temper than had she tried to out-argue her. So she answered the fool according to his folly. "You foolish old thing! don't you know that a man has a right to his wife's earnings?"

"Lor' bless me! what a ninny I was not to think of that! Of course I know it! But he talked so fair that I vow I forgot all about it."

"Now, Mrs Marville, with all your experience, do you mean to say that if we chose we could not go on a starring engagement to America without a Mr Jones?"

"Well, I daresay we could."

"Then don't talk to me any more about

Mr Jones. I hate the sound of the man's name."

Mrs Marville hailed this answer as an indication that her whilom pupil was not likely to be caught in the toils of love yet.

Nevertheless, from the day when the Longbeach manager made his offer and was refused, Mrs Marville watched with Argus eyes all unmarried managers—nay, even walking-gentlemen—lest, unawares, Junia might fall in love, and she lose thereby her goose with the golden eggs. "For," she argued, "when once a girl does fall in love, there is no saying what silly things she won't do. Ah, I ought to know; I've been through it all." She little knew what tears of mortification Junia shed in secret, that she, once the beloved of Carlo Falconieri, should have come to such a pass that a country manager offered her marriage, because she was a respectable young lady and he wished to keep her so!

Yet, for a respectable young lady, and a "lady born," Junia had tastes which were totally incomprehensible to Mrs Marville. She

would be silent and proud when a manager's wife condescended to speak to her; but she would talk to a dresser, or to one of the useful people, as familiarly as though they were her equals. She would stop and hear about their troubles, and give them good advice and money. And yet she loved money, Mrs Marville believed, for she grudged such sums as were necessarily spent upon her wardrobe. And once, not long after the offer of the Longbeach manager, Mrs Marville saw her act so as to raise a suspicion of her respectability. She saw her kiss one of the ladies!

The company was a large one; and its size was only equalled by its respectability. The leading lady (for the serious parts) was a well-known manager's daughter; in private life a quiet, humdrum mother of a family. The lady whom Junia kissed was the walking-lady; "and she was a sinner" — the only one among them all.

It was on a Saturday night. All the actresses had quitted the dressing-room except Mrs Marville and Junia, a dresser, and

this woman, scarcely less beautiful than Junia, and scarcely a woman in years yet.

The two had played many scenes together. Now this poor creature was going away to some other theatre, and at the last moment she remembered that Miss Angela Gabrielli had always been civil and kind to her, which the other ladies had not been.

"Would you mind giving me a kiss?" she said.

And Junia, putting her arms round her, kissed her, and prayed God bless her with all her heart, and with the tears standing in her eyes.

The poor creature (so finely dressed!) said, "O Gabrielli, I wish I could be like you! I wish I had known you long ago!" and was gone, while once more Junia prayed God bless her.

But Mrs Marville was so beside herself with anger, that she rose and boxed Junia's ears, and called her by an ugly name.

Junia burst into tears. "What have I done that you should treat me so?" she asked.

"Done!" Mrs Marville shrieked. "To kiss that carrion! Ugh! You dare ask me what you've done? You dare pretend you don't know what she is? Every lady in the company knows."

"It was because I knew what she was that I kissed her."

"The barefaced little wretch, I'll box her ears, I will," said Mrs Marville.

"If you do, I will never speak to you again," was Junia's answer.

Mrs Marville knew that when Junia adopted that tone she meant exactly what she said; and she regretted her precipitancy. Junia went on, "I daresay I should have kissed her of my own accord, even had she not asked me."

"O Lor'!" Mrs Marville exclaimed, "you make my very blood run cold. You can't touch pitch without being defiled. There's Scripture for that, you know, so it must be true. I would give fifty pounds you hadn't kissed that girl. How often have I told you you can't be too careful! The dresser saw

you, and I promise you she stared. Next thing I hear will be that you are talked of as a friend of that—that—— Oh dear, oh dear!"

"I wish I had had the chance of being her friend, long ago," said Junia. "How was it that I could bear hunger better than she could? It was just that which made all the difference between us. I did not mind being hungry as much as she did. And besides, I had my dear ones to think of, who were loving me, I knew, though so far off; while she, poor soul, had not a friend in the world. Now when I was in great straits God sent me you. Oh why did not God send her somebody?" And Junia's tears fell fast, not for herself — she had forgotten Mrs Marville's blow,—but for the woman who was a sinner.

"Oh my angel, do have done!" cried Mrs Marville. "It is no earthly good asking why the Almighty did this, or why He didn't do that. The Lord might strike you dead for saying such wicked things."

"But I cannot help myself. I try never to think; but whenever I do, I am asking myself

some such question: Why does God hide Himself afar off? Do we not want Him down here among us as much as ever the Israelites of old did?"

"Really, with your fine education, you should be ashamed to say such things. It sounds quite blasphemous—quite."

"Shall I ever know? Shall I know when I am dead?" Junia sighed to herself.

"You say that on purpose to aggravate me," Mrs Marville cried. "Look here now. I'm sorry I boxed your ears. Will you kiss and be friends?"

Junia gave a willing assent. But after that episode Mrs Marville watched her closely, and wondered to see that, though her pupil had touched pitch, yet she was not defiled.

CHAPTER VII.

A LONG provincial tour had just been completed, and Mrs Marville was busy negotiating (as Junia's agent) a fresh one which was to take herself and her pupil all round the world; when at the hundred and tenth performance of a burlesque called "Endymion," in which there was an unusual amount of singing and dancing, Junia suddenly broke down.

So utter was the physical collapse, that neither goad nor spur, neither coaxing nor scolding, could rouse her. Mrs Marville, alarmed and angry, sent at last for Mr Marsden. He came, looked at Junia, and said to Mrs Marville, "Well, ma'am, you've done it at last."

"Done what?" cried Mrs Marville, always ready for a battle.

"You have worked the willing horse to death."

"I?—I work her to death? 'Tis I who am worked to death. Ain't I her agent, her chaperon, her teacher? Don't I take all trouble off her hands? What has she got to do but play her parts and draw her salary? She's caught a cold, I tell you—'tis nothing but a cold. And I declare if she loved the profession as I do, 'twould take more than a cold to make her give in like this. Don't I remember the time when I played for two nights with a blister on my chest? That I did, doctor!"

"We all know that you are a wonderful woman, my dear ma'am," said Mr Marsden; "but you must not forget that everybody is not like you. Miss Berr—— Miss Gabrielli wants rest, and she must have it at once."

"At once! Oh, Mr Marsden, she's got three farewell nights yet. After that——"

But Mr Marsden put an absolute veto on the farewell nights. He took Mrs Marville aside, and told her she was killing her goose

with the golden eggs. She was forced at last to give her consent to a postponement of every engagement for Junia; and with many groans and regrets, started off on a less lucrative tour with Mrs Bunce and Jemmy, and a hastily procured substitute for Junia's parts.

It seemed to Junia that, if she could be somewhere for a while, where the name of Angela Gabrielli had never been heard — never been seen in gigantic letters on boardings and dead walls — where no echo of aught appertaining to her profession had ever reached—she would get better immediately. Such a place was Dittisham. To Dittisham she went, resuming her own name. Mrs Anderson was living in the same house, and was full of delight at seeing her.

"All my old lodgers come back to me," she said. "And you have come to be nursed, miss, I see that."

"Yes," said Junia. "Do the best you can for me; for I must go back to my work again in a few weeks."

"So you haven't made your fortune yet? eh, miss?" Junia shook her head.

"Well, miss, no disrespect to you; but teaching ain't the trade to make a fortune by."

"Probably not," said Junia.

Quiet Dittisham would have been surprised indeed had it been made known within its borders that the pale lady in a plain black dress who sat daily on the sea-beach was a famous burlesque actress. The relief of not being watched and stared at (as happened daily in her theatrical life) was a good medicine to Junia. The solitude, in which she was able to open again her Italian books, untouched for years, also helped her greatly. But though she daily gained strength, she felt not the less an unconquerable repugnance to all the details of her profession, and to resuming the life she had lived with Mrs Marville. During the years they had lived and worked together, Junia had schooled herself to bear with equanimity the constant solecisms in manners committed by Mrs Marville, which

a delicately-bred woman finds most hard to forgive. But Mrs Marville had given her bread when she was starving; and it seemed to Junia that in allowing herself to feel disgust at her benefactress's want of refinement she should be guilty of the basest ingratitude. To bring herself to witness these various solecisms as though she neither saw nor heard them, she believed had been for herself a salutary discipline. That such discipline should require a repetition showed, as she thought, an innate baseness of soul, from which she struggled to be free but could not.

Six weeks had been mentioned by Mr Marsden as the probable limit of Junia's enforced rest. Mrs Marville, who had no sooner let her go than she must try to get her back, wrote before a month was over, wishing to persuade Junia to agree to arrangements for the grand tour she had projected. Junia was on the point of fixing a time for the beginning of this tour, when a letter came from June, telling her that he should land at

Liverpool in five weeks from the date of his letter, and desiring her to be there if possible to meet him. This completely turned the current of Junia's thoughts. June, she knew, would not have come back unless he had been prosperous in some degree. She began to hope that the long-deferred time was come when he could give her a home in the rough house he had built for himself. She wrote, adjourning all theatrical engagements; but not telling Mrs Marville her secret hope that she might never need to appear on the stage again!

One evening after dusk Junia sat in the little garden, listening to the subdued plash of the outgoing tide, when two people passed, who, after looking at the house and consulting together, crossed the footpath and knocked at the door. Mrs Anderson was gone out, and Junia was debating within herself whether she should ask the strangers' business, when a well-known voice said, in mellifluous accents, "*Ma! pare che non c'è nessuno in casa.*" (It seems there is nobody in the house.)

"Signor Paolo!" Junia cried, stepping ruthlessly across Mrs Anderson's one flower-bed.

"Isabella, who is that?" There was surprise—almost terror—in the man's voice, as though he expected *sbirri* to appear from unknown corners. Junia, remembering his nervousness, mustered up courage to reply, "It is I—Junia!"

Then two motherly arms were round her, and the signora was kissing her and crying and exclaiming, all in a breath. Junia took them into her own sitting-room, and made them sit down till Mrs Anderson returned, for they had come to Dittisham to lodge for a while.

Signor Paolo had been, as he told Junia, for the last year in London, engaged in researches in the British Museum in connection with a learned, but—as a shake of the signora's head had emphatically told Junia—not a lucrative, undertaking. At length he had found it advisable to give his eyes rest; and as his labours were not yet terminated, instead of returning to Italy, he had come to Dittisham,

because it was out of the way, and therefore cheap.

It was not until her Italian friends had replied to all her inquiries about the state of affairs in Italy, that Junia—her turn come to be questioned on her own affairs—began to feel conscious of a painful restraint. Nor was this lessened when the signora said, at the first private opportunity, "Carlo will be grieved to hear how pale you look, my child."

"I should think Carlo had forgotten my existence by this time," said Junia. The signora smiled at the conscious blush, and replied that, so far from having forgotten her existence, Carlo had charged her to go to Nunehead, if possible, and see Junia; and if she had left the place, to inquire for her and seek her out.

"Did you go?" Junia asked, with a beating heart.

"No, I could not leave Paolo, for I was of some use to him as amanuensis. But I should have gone there soon, had I not so happily

met you. Junia, if you refuse Carlo again you will be doing a very wrong thing."

"He will never ask me again."

"Indeed he will. He would have come to England on purpose long ago, but he was asked by —— to accept a confidential post, which has given him a great deal of work ever since, and will continue to do so for some time to come. But I know he will ask you again to be his wife. Only he thinks he shall persuade you better with his voice than by writing a letter."

"He nearly persuaded me once," said Junia.

"Then you did like him! And you refused him!"

"It was more than liking. But I did not know that till afterwards. Don't let us talk any more about it, please, signora."

That a young woman should confess so calmly to having refused a young man whom she liked, and should cap the confession by a request to change the subject, was something new to the Italian, who was never so happy as

when discussing a love-affair. Old or new, fortunate or the reverse, it gave her the same gusto. Practically, she was quite content with the modicum of love bestowed on her by her Paolo. Theoretically, she held that a woman must be either loving or beloved on to the age of fifty, when, she would say with much sagacity, "A woman may be respectable, but is no longer adorable."

"Ah, you are become very English—very, very English," she said, shaking her head at Junia. "But you are none the happier for so much reticence—no."

But it was more serious, and more painful to Junia when the signora began to make minute inquiries about her family. All she knew of Anna's life since their parting was, that Anna was married and had two children. All she knew of her brother Edward was, that he had lately gone to India. For even such meagre knowledge as this she was indebted to the 'Times' newspaper. She informed the signora in as few words as possible that there was an estrangement between

herself and all the members of her family except June. "But that is all I can tell you—absolutely all," she said, stopping at once the eager flow of language—surprise, regret, conjecture—which rushed, as in a flood, from the signora's lips.

Thus, when the first flush of joyful greeting was scarcely over, a restraint sprang up between Junia and her two old friends, painful on both sides, but most painful to Junia.

"I will not believe that Anna was in the wrong," said Signor Paolo, when his wife informed him of the estrangement. "Anna was logical—for a woman, that is; and had more common-sense than the whole of the family put together. Who knows? Perhaps they are only kept apart by some mean feminine jealousy," said Signor Paolo. "We have a hundred such examples in Italian history."

"But Junia had nothing mean about her," said the signora.

"True! It comes to this, then—that we know absolutely nothing about the matter. Good. Let us not waste time by discussing it."

But while the signor was putting aside Junia and her affairs, Junia was painfully debating within herself whether she could venture to confide in Signora Isabella. It had been taken for granted at the beginning by the signora and her husband that Junia was still a governess; and that she was recruiting her health and resting from overwork. The deception had been passive, not active, on Junia's part; but it was nevertheless deception, and her whole soul recoiled from practising it. If the signora had been quite alone, Junia would not have hesitated; but to tell her a thing was but telling Signor Paolo at second-hand. And how could she tell her, with the certainty of its reaching Signor Paolo's ears, that she was the unequalled burlesque actress, Angela Gabrielli?

Worse even than Signor Paolo's knowing was the certainty that he would tell Carlo; and that whatsoever opinion he chose to express would have weight with Carlo. As far as Junia's recollection served her, Carlo agreed with his old tutor in his opinion of the

stage more nearly than on most other topics. Carlo's opinion of the stage was, that it was a blot on Christianity; the signora's, that it was a blot on civilisation. Junia dimly remembered the old Marchese, her father, and Signor Paolo, discussing how a reform of the stage, so imperatively needed, could best be brought about. And this was before the day of burlesque had dawned! What would Carlo and his old tutor say, thought Junia, if they could imagine the spangled nakedness of the scenes in which she had played a part? Would they say, "To the pure all things are pure?" Hardly that. "Only God knows—only God," said Junia to herself. "How should they know? Appearances are against me. I must leave it all to God. If He will but remember me one day!"

Her resolution was quickly taken. She would go to Liverpool and wait till June's ship came in. She made her adieus to the two Grilli as brief as possible.

"But you will come back? You must come back with June," they said, all their

former warmth returning in the prospect of Junia's sudden departure.

"I do not know. I shall go wherever June pleases, of course," Junia replied. "Perhaps he will wish to travel about and see England."

The signora drew her aside, and said, emphatically, "You must come back. I wrote to Carlo to-day; and I am sure he will be in England soon. Junia, you know you love him."

"I told you as much. I think him the best of human beings except June. You may tell him just that, but no more."

"You shall tell him yourself."

"No, signora. I shall never see him again; else, do you think that I would have told you so much?"

"And he will come and find you gone! How tiresome — how perverse!" cried the signora.

CHAPTER VIII.

When at length Junia stood on the wharf with her twin-brother by her side, it seemed as if all her difficulties and perplexities had vanished, never to trouble her any more. "How had she managed to go on living so long without him?" she asked herself, looking with a sense of support and comfort into his face—the same face, yet not the same. Nevertheless, her June most unmistakably; June, more deep-voiced, more ruddy, more lion-maned; but the pearl of brothers as before. At their first embrace it came back to her, as it were but yesterday, how they had parted. He, brave and strong, going forward in simple faith to the unknown sea and the unknown land; she, tremulous, sick with terror, at the

thought of the sea—the horrible sea—which he must cross.

And there he was! The sea had let him alone. How many a woman's hero had it swallowed up! but not her hero, her blue-eyed king. Nay, it had borne him back to her. Therefore Junia began to be less afraid of it; began to think that perhaps in time she might come to love it a little, though not as a true daughter of Albion should, with unreasoning enthusiasm, but with much fear mingling with a little love.

What a contrast was June's companionship to that of Mrs Marville! Junia thought, as day after day passed, and she descended to the breakfast-table to meet her brother, fresh, trim, and smiling genially; instead of Mrs Marville, in curl-papers, with a horrid dog-eared play-book in her hand, rehearsing aloud, between her sips of tea and her mouthfuls of bread-and-butter!

Then the repeated warnings, "Angel, that's your cue." "Now then, Angel, look alive; you're half asleep." And the tappings of

knife, spoon, fingers — nay, fists—upon the table, when Junia's memory flagged! Junia remembered regretfully how unangelic her own temper had sometimes become under the constant irritant of these meal-time rehearsals. For she remembered, too, how this uneducated, vulgar woman had taken her in, a-hungered, and cherished her as her own daughter. "If ever I forget that," Junia had said to herself many a time, "may I be punished as I deserve!"

Yet when she and June were speeding to Florence, as fast as trains could carry them, it seemed to Junia more than ever impossible that she should go back to Mrs Marville again. At the same time, the way did not seem very clear out to Canada. June did not say he could not take her back with him if she wished it; but he did not seem to wish it very strongly himself.

"You do not look robust," he said. "You are so pale, and worn, and frail, that I should not have known you on landing had you not come forward to speak to me. I scarcely

know how you would bear the climate. And the life would be so strange."

"Pale, and worn, and frail." The words went with a stab to Junia's heart. And he said it all so quietly, as if it were a thing of nought. "As if," thought Junia, with some indignation, "anything could outweigh the pleasure of being with him! He ought to know that. As if I should mind the horrid climate!"

It was no myth, however, this same horrid climate. Junia shuddered at June's account of the life out in Canada, as it appears in its ruder aspect to the settler in outlying parts. She seemed—as was but natural—to get a clearer idea of the place and the people through one day's talk with June than she had got through all his letters. June was clever at *vivâ voce* descriptions. Junia listened, shuddering and fascinated, as he unrolled before her mental vision scene after scene of the strange life in the backwoods, which he had tried first; then again of the prairie life, no less strange, of which he had had some glimpses before finally

settling down; of the long terrible winter; of the raging heat of summer, when man's strength is taxed to its utmost to get the fruits of the earth safely garnered before the north wind brings back the snow. Junia listened to these stories of heat, and toil, and ice and snow, feeling as if June had been amid the flame and frost of an Inferno, and had escaped alive to tell her. Only when he spoke of his feet having been frost-bitten, the first winter, did Junia bid him stop. "I can hear no more," she cried. "What a horrible country! And you might have died!"

June smiled. "What then?" he asked. "There is another life."

But Junia said eagerly, "Why do you wish to stay there? See now, June, I have a little money. Sell your farm and put your money with mine, and let us buy a place somewhere in dear Italy—a place with a nice old villa on it."

June smiled—in a grave, absent way, too—at her eagerness; and met the proposal with sundry objections. Nor did he appear affected by any argument Junia could bring forward.

"It is too late to change now," he said, finally; "and I do not know that I would change if I could."

So Junia's vision of vineyards and corn-fields, with orange-trees on the terrace, and passion-flowers starring the walls, vanished into the nothing whence it had sprung.

June's travelling programme was meant to include all the chief cities of Italy, beginning with Florence. At the mention of Florence Junia had winced inwardly, but had said nothing. It was not possible to say to June, "I do not wish to go to Florence, because I cannot bear to meet Carlo." And even had it been possible, she would not have said it, seeing June's eagerness to go. What was she that she would destroy one hardly-earned pleasure of his? "If it comes," she thought, as the chance of seeing Carlo, and having his offer repeated, crossed her mind, "I must bear it as I have borne other things." Perhaps June would not wish for more than a glimpse of Florence, she thought, and things would shape themselves somehow.

But when Florence was reached, the old spell worked, and June could not tear himself away. Casa Falconieri was empty, its master gone "to Paris," old Nanni said, Paris being the Ultima Thule of the average Tuscan. June was disappointed; but the house was there, and that was something. "The dear old house, where we were so happy," he said. Junia wandered with him through their old rooms and in the gardens, thinking, "Would Carlo seek me still if he knew all about me?" And alternately the answer was "yes" and "no."

To visit day after day the well-remembered pictures and statues was, as it seemed, a pleasure inexhaustible, a perennial fount of delight.

"Here, at least," thought Junia, "there is no cloud in the sky. Here, in the gracious company of the dear old masters, we have delight without bitter remembrance."

But who dares say, "I have," "I hold"? As the breath passes our lips our possession vanishes.

One day, when the two were standing be-

fore Masaccio's frescoes in the Beaucacci chapel, suddenly a long deep sigh burst from June—a sigh that was almost a sob; and he walked away abruptly in the midst of a criticism of Junia's on the foreshortening of St Peter's right arm.

Surprised, Junia turned to follow him. She saw him go to a dark corner and weep, covering his face with his hands. She sat down and waited, wondering at first what could have called forth such deep emotion, all the more unexpected because of his usual placidity. He did not join her till he had walked twice slowly round the church. But that gave Junia time enough to guess why he had left her so strangely. Doubtless it was that, seeing the wonderful work of that immortal trio, with the sense of freshness which comes from long disuse, the desire to take up the old, beloved, artist life, had sprung up within him; and had made the contrast between what he was and what he had hoped to be too painful to be borne. She might have supposed something like this to be the case long before, had

not June appeared to be so peculiarly gifted with the happy faculty of taking things as they are and making the best of them.

Till now it had mattered little to Junia (after the first disappointment was over) whether June were a painter or a farmer. June was June, whatever he was: always brave and honest; a brother any sister might be proud of. Now, when she reflected on what he had given up—on his talents wasted, his hopes extinguished—all because uncle Odynell would not let him have the pittance which would have supported him while making a name for himself,—now that all this was forced on her recollection, the old anguish of disappointment came back, and Junia, too, could look no longer on the pictured walls, but rose hastily and went to meet her brother as he came towards her.

He was graver than usual, and did not speak during their drive back to their hotel on the Lung'arno. Junia was resolved that art reminiscences should never bring another cloud to June's horizon while he and she were

together. His holiday being spoilt would effectually spoil hers. They would let the dead past and its pictures alone, and go to Ischia, or Capri, or Sorrento, and make holiday with only Nature for their playfellow—Nature, who never turns traitor to her faithful followers.

Something of this kind Junia ventured to say when she sat by June in the evening at their drawing-room window overlooking the Arno.

"Are you then tired of Florence already?" he asked.

"Not I! But it seemed to me that perhaps we had had as much art as was good for us just now."

"Are you so changed? The time was when art was the be-all and end-all of your existence, as it was of mine."

"It is just that," she replied, laying her hand on his. "I have been remembering—as you have—all we hoped to be, and to do, together,—you helping me, I helping you; for I used to dream of being a second Mar-

garet von Eyck; ay, something more! And now, see, this life of yours, and of mine, so different to that of which we dreamt — so wide apart. Your letters from Canada were always so cheerful—so far from expressing regret at the change—that I at last began to think you did not mind; that you were become resigned to your circumstances, as people say. Even when you wrote once that you were ill, there was not a word of regret. I did wonder, I confess; for I believed that if you were anything you were a painter. And yet it seemed to me as if you were more philosopher than painter. Still it was better so, for regrets could do no good. Had I been situated as you were, I should have regretted bitterly; and rather than you should regret now, June, I would never ask you to look at another picture again."

June was silent for a little while; then he said, "I was not the philosopher you imagined, for my regret was bitter and hard to overcome. I should regret bitterly, even now, did I not know that, in submitting to the

inevitable, I am doing God's will. Only now and then it seems hard. It seemed hard this morning. To think that I, who could handle a pencil almost as soon as I could speak, should have come to handle the plough and be thankful! O Junia!"—he turned his head away—"so hard to bear was it sometimes; the unaccustomed manual labour; the sordid care for the morrow; the daily, nightly companionship of coarse, uneducated men,—that, but for the grace of God, I must have become either a drunkard or a suicide."

They were silent: June from emotion; Junia from astonishment, pity, admiration.

"O my June!" she cried at last, her heart swelling with love and pride; "you have fought a good fight. *Coraggio!* You will be a great man one day; though you will never be a great painter."

"I do not care a *fico* for being a great man; my sole ambition was to be a great painter. But that is dead and gone. Let us enjoy to-day as best we can, for we have earned our holiday."

"Do you not wish sometimes—I did this morning—that you had never been able to draw a line; never known red from blue?"

"Never! Has not this knowledge of red and blue procured me hours of the sweetest, purest delight that ever visited the heart of man? Because sight may fail to-morrow, would I wish to have been born blind, never to have seen my sister's face? No; what I have once enjoyed is mine for ever, to thank God for."

He went on speaking, and Junia wondered more and more. As with the Israelites in their wanderings, so he said had it been with him. God had been with him, directing him in all perplexities: in those which men account as small, as well as those which men account as great; for there was no great and small with God. And he spoke of God as if he knew Him. So constant had been his sense of the Divine Presence,—always strongest when most needed,—that never for one day had his faith suffered eclipse. And so, he trusted, it would be to the end.

"It is not given to all to be so blest," said Junia. "It seems to me that Providence does not look after everybody. Some people have to get on as best they can, with World, Flesh, and Devil against them: one down, the other comes on—hard knocks and no quarter from any."

"But God is looking after us all the while, though we may not know it."

"Then how *can* things happen that do happen?"

"Only the God knows who lets them happen. It is no blind chance that rules the world."

"Then was God looking after me when I was forced to turn actress?"

"Why not?"

His calm, simple question seemed fraught with the bitterest irony. If God was, as June said, looking after her, how was it that she would rather be torn in pieces than act her celebrated part of Venus in the "Tiff in High Life," while June was on this side the Atlantic? Why should she fear June's scorn more than she feared death? Alas! World, Flesh,

and Devil, these were her gods, despised and feared, buffeting and being buffeted, doing her now a good, now an evil turn. But it might be that the end was come. What was fierce heat, or fiercer cold, to such a conflict as she had been waging? What though she had to sweep floors in Canada? Might one not sweep floors with joy, knowing that thus one was fulfilling God's law? It seemed that beyond that terrible sea, which had so long divided her and June, her true refuge lay.

But when again Junia urged her brother to quit Florence for some yet untried scene, he seemed anxious for delay. He was expecting letters, he said.

"Business letters?" Junia asked.

"Yes."

"If you want money I have plenty."

"No, I do not want money; and I have had too much of yours already."

The delay, causing them to miss a steamer to Naples, *viâ* Leghorn, seemed to fret June somewhat. He began to go himself to the post-office, instead of trusting to the hotel

servants for his letters. His restlessness communicated itself to Junia unawares. She too began to be anxious about his letters, and to fear that things must be going wrong at his farm in Canada.

One day—June had gone to "Vieusseux" to look at the English newspapers, and that done, was to take her for a drive to San Miniato—a letter was brought bearing the Canadian post-mark. There was also one for Junia from Mrs Marville. But the Canadian letter must be *the* letter June was waiting for. It was in a blue envelope, directed in a firm, lawyer-like hand. Junia put on her bonnet and went to meet her brother with it. He seemed pleased to get it, put it into his pocket without breaking the seal, and proposed going at once for their drive.

Sitting on the steps of San Miniato, Junia read Mrs Marville's letter :—

"I do trust"—the good woman wrote—"that now you are better you mean to set to work seriously to keep up your name and make money. I won't think so meanly of you

as to suppose that you are going to sit down satisfied with the little you have put by. I should hope you have more spirit than to do that. You have wasted the best part of three months already. I say nothing as long as your brother stays, but as soon as he is gone, for goodness' sake do come back, for I can't settle about anything till I see you, and I am shaking in my shoes lest some novelty may be advertised which may take the shine out of you. Mind this, we must go on our tour round the world this year; and you must drink porter whether you like it or not. And the plague of it is, that porter is as likely as not to put too much flesh on you, and then there is an end of Venus, Diana, & Co. I wish those stupid doctors would invent something to keep a girl symmetrical. They might, if they gave their minds to it. Let me know in time before you come back, that I may see about arranging farewell engagements, and getting properties together. And do remember that you will never be younger than you are, nor in a better way for making money. 'Make hay while

the sun shines,' is as good a proverb as any in Scripture, if it ain't there, which I believe it is. Anyhow it's true; and I'd din it in your ears if I could."

Junia, sitting on that pleasant sunlit Golgotha, asked herself, "Why should I not rest, and be satisfied with the little I have? Why should I spend my strength to heap up riches? Who will gather them? Surely a little peace, a little love, were worth more than all the money I shall ever get."

June had walked away to read his letter. When he returned, she said, "I should like it to be settled for me to go back to Canada with you. You always said—did you not?—that I might come as soon as you had a house fit for me to live in."

"Certainly," June replied. "My only doubt is respecting the climate, and the life for which you appear to me to be eminently unfitted."

"Why? I am not a fine lady. I have been accustomed to hard work of one kind or another ever since we parted. And I like doing useful things."

"I know you do. But you know no more than an infant what Canadian farm-life means to a woman."

"I should like to try. I should like to buy a tiny bit of land close to yours, and farm it. Surely it would not be harder for me to turn farmeress than it was for you to turn farmer."

June repeated, "A tiny bit of land!" and burst out laughing.

"Why do you laugh?" said Junia, vexed. "See what tiny plots of land the *contadini* have, and how beautifully they cultivate them!"

June laughed again. "Yes; but they are *contadini*, and you are a lady. It is true, I have seen a farm managed excellently well by a woman; but farmeresses, like poetesses, are born, not made. You may invest your money better than in a 'tiny bit of land.' And — I have been calculating, dear, what the interest will amount to of the various sums you sent out to me. After next harvest I hope to pay it, and perhaps part of the principal."

"Such a thing never entered my head!"

Junia exclaimed. "I gave freely; why can you not take freely?"

"My dear child," said June, in a grand conclusive way, "I made a resolution that the money you advanced me should be repaid to the last farthing."

"It was a silly resolution," said Junia, equally grand and conclusive—"a silly resolution, better broken than kept. As if I wanted the money back!"

"If you don't want it, keep it till you do. It is my duty to return it. I only want to keep the love that made you send it."

"That is very pretty; but you will not make me change my mind."

"Well, I am sorry, for I cannot change mine either. Besides, I am supported in this case by a better judgment than my own."

"I do not wish to hear any more on the subject. The sun is going down. Shall we go back now?"

"Not quite yet," June replied; for he had come out intending to tell her something,—and the afternoon was nearly gone, and he had not told it yet.

CHAPTER IX.

"WILL you ever guess what it is, I wonder?" said June, with his hand in his breast-pocket, where his letter was.

Junia looked at him. A pleasant light was in his eyes, a pleasant colour in his cheeks.

"Do guess!" She shook her head. "Well, then, I suppose I must tell you. Look here. This is my wife that is to be. What do you think of her, Junia?" He laid a photograph on her lap as he spoke. "Why, Junia, you look quite white and ill. Have I told you too suddenly?"

She turned; but there was such a mist in her eyes she could not see him. "Why did you not tell me all this time that you were engaged? You might have told me before, June. It was not right—not kind."

"I should have told you long ago, only she would not let me."

"Why not?" Junia asked, with some inward contempt for the unknown woman who had wanted to hide her engagement with June from her. If it was a good thing and a right thing, why should June have been made to keep it a secret?

June answered, "Because she said that when I returned to Europe I should certainly meet with some one who would suit me better. And she professed—foolish girl!—to be very much afraid of you, because you were beautiful and accomplished, and my twin-sister, and so forth. But I am glad you do know now, Junia. I told her that it did not seem quite kind to keep you in ignorance of what touched me so nearly. And she has acquiesced, as I expected she would. I told her she need not fear any one who loved me so unselfishly as you did."

"I am glad you told her that, June." She tried to get the better of her contemptuous mood; perhaps there was some good in this

woman after all. June could scarcely choose badly. She took up the photograph resolutely, saying, "Now you must tell me everything: how it came about, and whether you have known her long, and if she is pretty, and if her eyes are brown or blue, and all the rest of it."

As she spoke she looked at the photograph. She saw a turned-up nose, a mouth that stretched across the face like a frog's; eyes, indistinct and small—"Just like a pig's eyes," said Junia to herself—and a lengthy chin.

"Altogether hideous!" was Junia's verdict *in petto*.

She held the clue now to her brother's strange apathy—almost opposition to her going with him to Canada when he went back. This hideous woman was she who, cuckoo-like, was going to oust her from her own proper place in June's heart; was going to take sister's and wife's place too, pretending all the while she was afraid of her beauty and her accomplishments. And it was for this she

had toiled, and had kept her own purse so bare, to help June to make a home!

This hideous woman! Had Junia been alone she would have torn the photograph into a thousand pieces. But June was there, waiting for her to say something.

Woman-like, she gulped down the sob that was rising in her throat, and tried to say something *apropos*.

"Is this a good likeness? Is her hair so dark?"

"I do not consider the likeness a very good one; but to get a photograph at all out there is a great thing. She tells me it is thought very good. Her hair is not as dark as that. I don't think the eyes have come out very well."

"What colour are they?"

June hesitated. "Grey — that is, there is a peculiarity about them."

"Does she squint?"

June appeared so embarrassed, so unwilling to proceed, that she almost repented of her question. But his answer, when it came, made her inclined to cry and laugh together.

"Squint! No. What could put such an idea into your head? No. The peculiarity about them is a very uncommon one—at least—the fact is—one of her eyes is splashed or streaked with brown. That is all."

In pity to June, Junia repressed a shudder at hearing of this strange and unaccountable blemish in the woman he had chosen. "I am glad she does not squint," was all she could say. "Now tell me her name."

"Such an uncommon, lovely name. You would never guess it. She is called Charity."

"*La Carità!* Yes, that is pretty—in Italian."

"Charity—Charity Green. I do hope you will try to make her love you. I think—I hope—that she will be pleased to know that you think of going back with me."

Junia thought the contrary; but she kept her thought to herself for the present.

"Is she much younger than you and I?"

Again June appeared to hesitate.

"June, don't you know her age?"

"She is rather older than I am."

"Older! How much?" Junia persisted.

"Oh, I don't know exactly."

"Never mind," Junia went on, inexorably. "I shall ask her when I write to her; I always like to know people's ages. She won't mind my asking, of course. And she knows my age already, I suppose?"

"She is far too sensible to mind. But—I would not ask, if I were you. The question might be inopportune, perhaps."

"Why so? You don't mean that she is twenty years older than you, do you, June?"

"Twenty years! What rubbish! Seven or eight at the utmost."

"Seven or eight!" And again Junia was divided between the inclination to laugh and to cry. Seven or eight years older than June!

All the way home June told her of Charity's virtues. She was one of the race of born farmeresses; she was also a born doctress; she was clever at her needle; she was equally clever at casting up accounts; she could place a word in season; she had a gift

for tending the bedside of sick people, and for prayer with the dying. "In short," June summed up, "she is the best woman I ever met with; and I am sure it would do you good to know her."

But it did not seem to Junia that any good could come to her from knowing this hideous woman with the splashed eye.

She wrote to her, nevertheless, such a letter as she thought June would approve of, though she did not show it to him. But she told him that she had quite made up her mind to go to Canada, and that she had said as much in her letter. He reflected for a moment, and then said, "All right. I have my doubts as to your suitability to the climate and the life—I have very great doubts. But you seem to hate the stage, and you say it has worn you out. Why, I'm sure I don't know; but I don't understand those things."

"No, you don't," Junia answered. "But you can understand that, as I have never yet played a part I really liked—such as you thought, and I too, that I might perhaps

play one day—I have been all those years doing hard work of a kind I hated, more or less; and hard work that one hates tries more than hard work that one loves. You can understand that. Now I look upon my work on the stage as a sort of tread-mill; and so I feel that any change would be better."

"There is something in that," said June. "And as I said, you can but try. I daresay a year in Canada won't kill you, anyhow."

CHAPTER X.

THEIR wanderings had taken them as far as Milan. From thence they were going on to Venice. "And then," said June, with some regret in his tone, "my holiday will be over for the next twenty years." But again there was a delay because of the non-arrival of a Canadian letter. And Junia felt herself becoming almost as impatient about it as June, who talked for a day or two of going back to Florence to see whether it were not lying forgotten at the post-office. One morning Junia went to the post, and got a letter, which, it turned out, had been lying there for some days. This, doubtless, was the letter which June had been expecting. "I suppose she tells him how the pigs get on!" Junia thought, as she looked at the stiff hand-

writing and the business-like blue envelope. June, who saw her from the balcony of the hotel, ran down to meet her as she entered the courtyard. As he tore open the envelope a note fell out. "That is yours," he said, handing it to her. Junia took it, and went up-stairs to her room, feeling half afraid of it, as if it had a bodily presence of its own; and at the same time she was curious to know what kind of woman the writer would reveal herself to be. For with all her natural antipathy to ugliness, Junia knew well enough that the ugly ones of this world sometimes possess the warmest, kindest hearts. "At all events," Junia thought, "I told her I was willing to make myself useful in any way she liked, so she cannot object to my going out with June."

She opened the letter. At first the stiffness and strangeness of it gave her some slight amusement; but as she read on, her feeling changed to disappointment; and then to anger, because of the disappointment.

"DEAR MISS BERRINGTON,"—the letter ran, —"it was only after long and prayerful con-

sideration that I concluded to look upon your brother as my future partner."

(A nice beginning, truly! thought Junia. As if there was a woman in the world who ought not to be flattered at June making her an offer! And she eight years older! Her last chance, no doubt.)

"It is a matter which has been anxiously laid before the Lord; and if we are led to see that such a union is not in accordance with the Lord's will, I trust it may be frustrated."

("You wicked, wicked woman! You don't love June one bit! O my poor June! my poor June!" cried Junia, full of sisterly indignation.)

"Mr Berrington has made me acquainted with your desire to become an inmate of his dwelling, and has asked my opinion. I will be faithful with you, and tell you that I have been under much concern for your soul, ever since your brother told me that you followed a worldly calling. I take the present opportunity to remind you that the fashion of this world vanisheth away, and that we all have to

give an account of the deeds done in the flesh. Favour is deceitful, and beauty is a vain thing." ("I know that better than she does," said Junia, with a sigh, as she read on.) "I have long since cast in my lot with the Lord's people, and my earnest desire is that my friends should be as myself—members of that little flock to whom the Kingdom is given. I ask you solemnly, are you a member of that flock? Have you made your salvation sure? Feeling as I do that spiritual ties should be far more binding than earthly ones, it will be a cause of thankfulness to me if your answer proves such as may satisfy a humble but earnest Christian; so that we may look forward to obtain spiritual advantage from each other's acquaintance. For it is my earnest wish that all the members of my house, from the least to the greatest, shall serve the Lord. —Hoping for a satisfactory answer, I remain yours truly, CHARITY GREEN."

Junia remembered that she, in writing to Charity, had signed herself "Yours affec-

tionately." She had thought, indeed, as she wrote the word, that there was not much truth in it, for she was not feeling affectionate. Only, she knew, it would be impossible for her ever to hate anything or anybody who once really belonged to June. In cases of this kind somebody must make the first step, and perhaps pretending a little at first may make it come true at last. But it was clear that no make-believes, no sweet words, were able to win over Charity Green.

If only Charity had written a silly, gushing letter, full of nonsense about June, how she could have taken her to her heart and loved her! Junia thought. But instead of that, to be required to submit to a test! For, put into plain English, the letter said, "I wish to know whether you are fit company for one so good as I am."

Junia tossed the letter from her in her anger. They were all the same, she thought, these good people, all over the world. If one could but put them all aside, and only have to do with God!

Just then June came up-stairs. But few moments had, in fact, elapsed since they had separated to read their letters.

"What does Charity say?" he asked, hastily.

"You can read it," Junia said, picking it up and handing it to him. "As I understand it, I am not fit company for her. You may read it otherwise—or not."

"Tut, tut, child," said June, impatiently. He glanced through the letter. "She must have written this before she wrote to me—yes, it is dated the day before. Junia, I fear you will be greatly disappointed. I must give up Venice and go back as soon as ever I can."

"Give up Venice! Has she forbidden you to go?"

"Don't talk foolishly. Her father has had a stroke of paralysis, and she is in great trouble, and of course wants me to be there. Old Green was looking after my place while I was away, and now I must get back at once and look after his and mine too—poor old fellow."

It was not till they were fairly on the road to England that June made any allusion to his sister's arrangements for the future.

"It comes upon you rather suddenly," he said; "but after all, I don't see that you will be much inconvenienced. It is not as if you had any home affairs to wind up. Anything you require for the trip across you can easily get during the few hours we shall be in Liverpool."

"No need to talk of that," said Junia.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I should do you no good by going, nor myself either. I should have to come back again, whether or no; so I think I may as well stay where I am."

"But you need not come back unless you wished. At all events, your brother's house is the proper home for you. Besides—if that could be any inducement to you—I think you might be a great comfort to Charity just now; for I observe that you do not lose your head in emergencies as some women do."

"After what Charity has written," said

Junia, "it is very plain to me that her welcome depends on my fulfilling certain conditions which I am not prepared to fulfil, and most probably never shall be."

"Conditions! What conditions? I saw none. Where is her letter?"

Junia gave it to him, saying, "She requires a confession of faith from me such as I cannot give; for I will not tell a lie. If God has favourites I am not one of them. And Charity will not take me just as I am."

June read the letter with a changed face, and was silent for a moment as if reflecting. Then he said, "You are unjust to Charity —exceedingly unjust; and unjust to me as well. Why cannot you judge her by what I have told you of her instead of by her letter? Have I not told you how much better she is than the narrow creed in which she has been brought up? Poor Charity! her very handwriting is against her."

"I do not think I am unjust," said Junia, cut to the heart by the severity of her brother's words. "Let me put myself aside, as is best.

What would be the effect on your happiness were she and I not to be friends? not to get on together, as the saying is? Suppose she were to tell you one day that she wished I would go? How would you like to have to tell me that, June?"

"You are imagining impossibilities," said June. "Do you suppose it will add to my happiness to think that you are living—alone, perhaps—and without a duty or a pleasure in the world, when there is a place for you in my house which you will not fill, because you have taken up a prejudice against the woman I am going to marry?"

But Junia thought, remembering their conversations on the subject of her going out to Canada, he had waited all that time for Charity to give her consent to her living with them. For he had certainly not seemed so anxious at first when she had talked of going out with him. Rather the contrary. And now it was clear enough that he was really taking Charity's consent for granted. If she had given it plainly, he would have

said so. "Do not be angry about this, June," she said. "I am trying to do my best—to do what is right, that is."

"My dear Junia, I am not angry. I am disappointed—deeply disappointed, I confess; after supposing that you had made up your mind to brave the climate and other drawbacks, to find you changing your mind again merely because you do not like the tone of Charity's letter!—as if you could not trust me, when I tell you she will be glad to have you! I am disappointed; but I am not angry."

In every discussion somebody must have the last word. This time June had it; and might have had as many last words as he chose, for anything that Junia could say in reply, when he spoke in such tones as these. There are a thousand ways of expressing anger which a woman finds easier to bear than the magisterial way in which a man will sometimes declare he is not angry.

At a small station not far from Paris the express train by which they were travelling

came to an unexpected halt. Passengers put their heads out, rumours of an accident went round, and officials hurried mysteriously hither and thither, and refused to answer questions. At length it was explained that an accident had happened to a train, which had caused a block a few miles further on. They were waiting for a signal that the line was clear. Meanwhile no one was allowed to leave the carriages.

As the moments lengthened, however, those who were tired of sitting still got down to stretch their legs. June was one of these; and presently Junia, who was leaning back half asleep, was startled by a loud call from her brother, who was at the other end of the platform. She put out her head to see what was the matter.

"Who is over there, do you think?" said June, coming up in a hurry, and pointing to the glass-doors of a waiting-room which looked upon the platform. "There, see, at the third window, is Carlo Falconieri, squeezed in with three hundred miserable travellers waiting for

a train to take them on. I knew him directly. I bawled to him through the door that you were with me, and he wants to get out and speak to you. See! he is pulling at the door-handle, and the guard won't open the door for him, because it is against the rules. Do get down and come and speak to him."

"The train will be moving on presently," said Junia. "There will not be time."

The guards were indeed already walking slowly down the platform, calling out in their civil, lazy way, "*En voiture, messieurs, en voiture, s'il vous plait.*"

June got in. "Poor old Carlo! I should have liked to shake hands with him. There never was a better fellow." Then, looking out, he cried, "He has burst the glass-door open! Bravo! Here, Carlo—this way. Here we are."

The engine gave a preparatory whistle, and at the same moment a little dark man, haggard and travel-stained, jumped on the carriage-step and caught Junia's hands in his, crying, in Italian, "Junia, dearest Junia, have I found

you at last? Dearest friends, what joy is this! Speak to me, Junia."

The train was in motion, there was a chorus of shrieks from railway officials, and Carlo was dragged off the step by main force, while in the act of kissing Junia's hands. June sprang to the window as the train glided out of the station. "What utter madness!" he cried. "In England he would be fined for putting himself in such danger. Junia"—he turned to his sister, who had pulled her veil down —"what made him kiss your hands in that absurd way? I wish you would tell me the meaning of it all."

"I suppose he—he is fond of me," she said.

"It looked like it. But—fond of you! Did he ever say anything?"

"Yes; years ago, at Nunehead."

"And you refused him!"

"Yes. I could not help it."

"But I wonder you did not like him. He was always such a nice, good fellow—clever in his way, too."

„I did like him."

"Then why on earth were you so silly as to refuse him?"

"Because," Junia said, with an effort, "I wanted to save money for you, that you might begin to work on land of your own; and not go on being a poor labourer all the best years of your life. And I knew that you would have scorned to take money of my husband. What I gave must be my very, very own. And I should have scorned that you should take any other. Therefore I kept myself free."

"And have toiled on, and lost the best years of your life! And have become so frail, so worn——"

"What of that? If it were to be done I should do it again."

But June seemed scarcely to hear her.

"Junia, Junia! there never was such a woman as you, and there never will be. My dearest Junia!"

And Junia felt that she had her reward.

CHAPTER XI.

After parting with her brother, Junia went to London, feeling more utterly alone than she had ever felt in her life. For now she had June no longer: Charity, more pitiless than the sea, would always stand between them. And Junia felt that, neither to gain Charity's love nor to keep June's could she speak Charity's shibboleth. She knew that she had been cowardly in keeping back, and in toning down, such truths respecting her professional career as might shock her brother's sensitiveness. But to such cowardice as the profession of a faith which she did not feel, she could not stoop. To do so would be to descend to a deeper degradation than she knew of yet. It would be deeper and more indelible because

she had brought it on herself. She had said to June (this was before their meeting Carlo) that she would come whenever Charity asked her. But she knew that would be never. Charity would have a thousand reasons for not asking her to come; and June, believing in her wisdom, and above all, in her goodness, would acquiesce in that which she made inevitable, and accept it as the Divine Will.

While June, like an experienced traveller, had slept soundly in his corner of the carriage on the night following the meeting with Carlo, Junia had remained awake, thinking. In the gloom she had laid her cheek on her hands, just where Carlo's kisses had fallen, and had let herself think of him for a moment as her future husband. "Yes, I do love him enough," she had said to herself. "Not as I love June. But, as June says, that is quite another thing. For I love June as though I were mother and sister rolled into one."

"Will it—will it ever be?"

On her way to London this question had

presented itself to her more than once, and had, for a little while, stilled her grief at parting with June.

By-and-by, being alone in the railway carriage, she looked at her hands in the morning light, and thought, "Has the chalk spoilt them quite — these hands he kissed?" But the sunshine roused her from the opiate spell, and she cast her hands above her head like a wild woman.

"He did not know! Had he known, he would have passed by on the other side. Good-bye, Carlo—good-bye."

Her journey over, Junia sought out a lodging in a part of London in which she was quite unknown, and where she was not likely to meet with any of her theatrical acquaintances. She did not write to Mrs Marville, neither did she inquire at the agent's what her movements were. She felt that a few days of absolute rest of mind and body were necessary, and that these were not to be obtained in Mrs Marville's society.

The weather was dull, the street was dull, the rooms were dull. All the day Junia sat

with folded hands, a prey to abject melancholy.

For she believed she should see June no more, nor Carlo. And she was alone, with no pressing occupation to thrust back imperiously such thoughts of past and future as rose to her mind. Doubt after doubt arose, saying, with mocking voice, "Where is now thy God?"

For days Junia sat still, her mind tossed, drifted hither and thither, till sense and feeling were almost gone. Like to a poor battered wretch overtaken by rising waters, who, blind and dizzy, can see neither earth nor sky, so was Junia during those days.

At last she struggled to a foothold. No foothold of faith it seemed to her, but a standpoint — infinitesimally small — of knowledge. She clung to that. It was her last hope.

Perplexed by all that belonged to the past, ignorant of all that belonged to the future, unable to trust any one's word for anything, suddenly out of this mental darkness a light came. A belief in the necessity of personal holiness took hold of her—possessed her as it had never possessed her yet—became, on the

instant, strong, deep, all-pervading, within and without, burning as the burning blue of a Tuscan summer sky. No human soul can despair who believes in personal holiness—who believes she may get it for herself. Everything was gone from Junia,—home, kindred, love, the hope of a life spent in June's service,—girlhood's beauty, girlhood's beliefs. Now this belief stood out clear as day, and filled her chaos.

She could become better than she was.

Here was a life's work cut out!

Here was a self-evident, absolute truth. This she *knew*, in every fibre and fold of her heart and soul and brain.

"I will," she said, aloud. And with this word of self-consecration her physical torpidity vanished, and her mind regained its power of action.

There was no way (it seemed) of becoming good except by doing good. But how should she begin?

That first question was easy to answer. She would no longer continue doing that which her soul abhorred.

She had no thought of judging the hundred dancing-girls — genii, elves — who now and again had formed her background and heightened her stage splendour. She, held blameless among them all, could read a law that was written plainly in her inmost heart, and, reading it, had been more worthy of blame than they.

"I will retire," she thought. "But it shall be with no flourish of trumpets, no lingering farewells, no turning of a woman's gilded pillory into a goddess's pedestal. From this day forth I will have done with shams. Let who will take my place, and welcome. Nay, not welcome! What welcome should there be into such a heritage? Weeping and confusion of face were best. If only the era I helped to inaugurate might vanish from the stage with me!"

Early the next morning she went out to seek Mr Marsden and ask his advice. She believed that he might help her somewhat in a project which had been dimly forming itself in the recesses of her mind since she went to rest the night before. Mr Marsden was out, and his breakfast was waiting for him.

"That's the way," said the tall gaunt woman who acted as his housekeeper. "They never let him have a meal in peace. If there's an accident, it's sure to be just as I've a nice roast leg of mutton ready to dish up." She carried the coffee-pot away to the kitchen, grumbling, and Junia sat down to wait.

He came in when she had been waiting half an hour. "You here!" was his exclamation. Junia waited till he had begun his breakfast, and then told him of the resolution she had taken to retire from the stage.

"Are you serious?" he asked. "Mrs Marville talked of your going round the world with her."

"I know she has talked of it, and planned it; but I have agreed to nothing, and signed nothing, as yet. And I have made up my mind that I will retire at once, without any fuss; but what I have put by is scarcely enough for me to live on—at least in England." (She blushed a little, remembering all at once that she could live on such a sum in Italy.) "And even if it were, I should wish

to lead an active life as long as I have strength for it. I hate idleness."

"Right there.

"And that was why I came here. I want to do something—something good," she added, with emphasis. "Please help me to find a way, Mr Marsden."

Mr Marsden did not immediately reply, but stirred his coffee with a thoughtful air. Of all the strange sights he had seen in his life, this, he thought, was the strangest. This handsome young woman, who, as Mrs Marville had assured him, might make thousands upon thousands if only she would give her mind to it for the next few years, was sitting there before him, pleading, with clasped hands and the sweetest voice, for his help to find out something to do—something good.

He thought, "She has had a love-affair which has turned out badly."

He said, "I suppose that, in plain English, you are sick of the world, and want to turn nun. Is that it?"

"If you had been where I have been—in

Italy," said Junia, "you would know that I could not be sick of the world. But perhaps you do not love pictures as I do," she said, with a feeling of pity for the smoke-dried London surgeon. "What I really am sick of is being on the stage. The fact is, I am not fit for that branch of the profession to which I belong, and never was, and never shall be. And I am so determined to leave it that nothing will make me alter my mind; but I must do something—something good—something useful."

"Oh," said he, rubbing up his hair—there was not much of it—"there's no lack of things useful which you might do, only you wouldn't fancy doing them. In this parish, for instance, there are hundreds who, when ill, die for want of nursing: but nursing is not pretty work—except where you read of it in a book; and nursing poor people is very ugly work—worse for the nurses than for the doctors, I should say—for, as a rule, poor people are dirty, and pig-headed, and coarse. The doctor, you see, is come and gone in ten minutes; but the nurse must stay till the

patient gets well or dies; and, let me tell you, deathbeds are not pleasant—I've just come from one (ah, you shudder!)—and foul air is not pleasant, and oaths are not pleasant. And to a gentlewoman born and bred, like you, I should say that common vulgar grief would not be pleasant either."

Junia remained silent for a while, and he supposed he had convinced her, and went on drinking his coffee with a grim smile lurking in the corners of his mouth. Presently she spoke. "I will learn to be a nurse. Will you help me?"

"Are you serious? Have you taken in the sense of what I have been saying?"

"I am as serious as if my life depended on it."

"You would be sick of such a life in one week."

"You cannot understand!" Junia cried. "If you only knew how I long for a time to come when for me there shall be no more singing and dancing; no more learning of doggerel rhymes and vulgar puns; no more paint and powder and gaudy finery!" Junia

stopped and hid her face. She felt as if Mr Marsden's reluctance to help her to some other life than this was sheer cruelty.

"The question is, Are you better fitted for the life of a sick-nurse than for the life of an actress? Have you considered the contrast between the two? Remember that there can be no recall before an excited audience for deeds of sick-room heroism. Take the disease from your patient and die. What then? You will merely have met your death in the discharge of your duty."

"I know all that."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

He gave something between a grunt and a sigh as he rose and went to the table where his desk lay. He wrote a letter and gave it to Junia, saying, "If you really are serious, the best thing I can do will be to give you an introduction to some people with whom I have had to do professionally. They spend their lives in doing good; and if you are sincere in your wish, you cannot, I think, do better than

join yourself to them. I have written to the lady I know the best, Miss Marriott; Sister Agnes, they call her. You will find her a very pleasant person to deal with; open and sincere, and no nonsense about her."

"Is it a sisterhood to which you are going to introduce me?" Junia asked, in dismay.

"Why, yes; a sort of sisterhood. Is that an objection? They are not Romanists; quite the reverse, they tell me."

"But—would they take me?" said Junia, almost in a whisper. "Would they take a woman who had been on the stage? You know what a prejudiced world this is. And then—my sister—she bid me hide myself—years ago—before I became the great burlesque actress they call me. She would not endure that it should be known. She would not endure even that *you* should know who I am, Mr Marsden. And yet few people object to letting a doctor know a family secret. But my sister is not like most people."

"Ah! I know somebody else who isn't like most people," said the doctor to himself. Then

aloud, "You are a gentlewoman—always have been, and always will be."

"Of course," said Junia; "I was born so, and cannot help it."

"Well, it is the rule of these good people to admit those who are fit for the work without respect to their social rank. You might be a duchess or a dressmaker, it's all the same to them, if you have the making of a good nurse in you. Now I do not see myself that anything more is necessary than to assure them of your respectability. I have said in my letter — you can see it if you like — that I have known you for some years; that you are alone in the world; and that you desire to devote yourself to good works. I have also said that you are not penniless, but that you do not possess a competency. Is that correct?"

"Quite so," said Junia, as she rose to leave. "Thank you very much."

Mr Marsden looked doubtful. "Don't thank me yet; wait till you have tried it. Wait till you get to Jerningham's Rents, and see where Sister Agnes lives."

CHAPTER XII.

JUNIA set out, furnished with various directions for finding Jerningham's Rents : with so many, indeed, that she felt bewildered ; and Mr Marsden had summed up by saying, "You will get on all right as far as Little John Street, and then you must ask a policeman."

Through the broad streets and spacious squares Junia went on boldly without losing her way ; but at Little John Street she was glad to be directed onwards by a policeman. She began to feel herself out of her place ; or, more strictly, that her dress was out of place ; and it seemed as if the policeman thought so too, by the way in which he looked at her when she asked for Jerningham's Rents. But he directed her civilly, and she went on, getting into a poorer, lower neighbourhood at

every step. At last, in a labyrinth of narrow streets, she found the place she sought.

Jerningham's Rents was up a narrow passage where the sunlight never entered; where the fog stayed from year's end to year's end, except when the north-east wind drove it out for a day or two in the month of May. Jerningham's Rents could scarcely have been a source of wealth to its proprietor, one would think. The houses looked ready to tumble out into the tiny space in front of them, where the pump stood. One, more rickety than the rest, was shored up. At the house next to this one Junia knocked. It was the only house in the court which had windows both clean and whole. Here, if anywhere, Sister Agnes should be found.

The door was quickly opened by a woman of thirty or thereabouts—a woman with a pleasant, rosy face, short in stature, and inclined to be stout. Her dress, plain and neat, yet was lacking in that luxurious neatness that else might have led Junia to take her for a quakeress. Her gown was of coarse black

stuff, and her head was covered by a white cap tied under her chin. Her voice and manner were those of a well-bred woman, but her hands were coarse, and not over-clean. Such was Sister Agnes.

Junia presented Mr Marsden's letter, and was desired to sit down. While Sister Agnes read the letter Junia looked round the room, which was scrupulously clean, though poorly furnished. Back from the room and its furniture her glance came to the sister's face. And there Junia saw that there was a difficulty. Perhaps she did not look good enough.

"You are Miss Berrington?" Sister Agnes said; and as she spoke her eyes took in Junia's appearance from head to foot.

"That is my name. Mr Marsden has explained my object," said Junia, timidly.

"I fear," said Sister Agnes, politely, "that you have made a mistake. Many people have very false ideas as to the nature of a sister's life."

"I believe Mr Marsden explained to me quite clearly what it was like. My only fear

was that perhaps want of money would prevent my entering the sisterhood; and—besides—I have never been accustomed to do good works; but I do want to learn — as I told Mr Marsden."

"If the directors considered you a fit person you would not be rejected for want of money. Some of the sisters are rich—some are quite poor; but that is not our business. We are not allowed to inquire into the extent of any sister's income; rich or poor, all are equal at the Home."

"And you live together merely to do good?"

"That is our sole object; a sufficient one, is it not?"

"I wish to make it mine," Junia sighed. "Nothing else seems worth living for."

"But mere wishing is no good," said Sister Agnes, in a didactic manner. "For instance, a great deal of common-sense is needed."

"Yes."

"And firmness."

"Yes, yes! Do you think," said Junia,

eagerly, "that they would take me on trial, on Mr Marsden's recommendation? We cannot be quite sure of anything till we have tried."

"That is quite true. I am going back to the Home this evening, and will show our director Mr Marsden's letter. Of course you must be aware that it does not depend on me whether you are received or not."

"Let me tell you one thing," said Junia. "For years my life has been one of hard work. I have been forced to learn to obey without questioning; and oh, I do want to do a little good before I die! Please say that. Please tell them that I will be very obedient; and that I want to do a little good before I die."

Sister Agnes looked at her attentively—coldly, Junia thought. "Are you quite in earnest, Miss Berrington?"

"Why should you doubt it?" Junia asked, wondering.

"Because one always judges more or less from appearances. I may be mistaken, but

from your appearance I should say you were fit for anything rather than the life of a sister. Can you fancy yourself in a white cap and black dress like mine? That fashionably-made black silk and lace trimming would have to be given up."

Junia blushed. It was a dress she had bought to wear while June was with her; because June, she thought, would be best pleased to see her well dressed, as in their younger days. "It does not matter," she said. "There is nobody to care now how I dress. Well or ill, it is all the same."

"Ah! but your hair! How would you get all that hair under a tight cap like mine?"

"Cut it short, to be sure," said Junia.

The sister smiled. Yet she had another objection ready. "Look at my hands; they do not look white and ladylike, do they? That partly comes of taking out dead ashes, piece by piece, from the grate, and putting in lumps of coal, lump by lump, with my fingers, in order not to disturb a patient's light sleep. Every night-watcher must do this, and a thou-

sand other distasteful things. We must never mind heat, nor cold, nor fatigue. The patient may be irritable, abusive: we must never lose patience. Our life is not only unfashionable"—she laid great stress on the word—"but unpicturesque. There is not even the attraction of asceticism; for no sister is allowed to wear herself out with nursing, if it can possibly be avoided."

"When you see me in a different dress," said Junia, "you will not think me a fashionable young lady."

"It is not the dress alone—it is everything,—the way you wear your dress, the twist of your hair, the turn of your neck—the way you stand, and sit, and enter a room. Pardon me," Sister Agnes continued, in a tone of apology; "I am only saying what the director will say in still plainer terms if you apply personally to him."

"I am not afraid of anything he can say."

"I may add, as it may save you some trouble and disappointment to know beforehand, that you will be required to bring a

medical certificate of good health. You will have to declare that you are not engaged to be married. Once a sister, you will be obliged to consult the council before you enter into any such engagement; and you will be expected to remain a sister unless some weighty reason exists to the contrary."

"That is all quite fair and just," said Junia. She asked the address of the director, that she might make her application at once. "My mind is made up. If I am not considered a fit person to be taken on probation, I shall begin to try what I can do among the poor by myself. The people look poor and miserable enough round here to touch the hardest heart."

"Yes, they are very poor and miserable. One more objection, Miss Berrington, and I have done. Do you think you are strong enough?"

"I have been strong enough to work, for some years past, harder than I shall have to work if I join you. I have been in the habit of never going to bed till past midnight."

"I fear you are very, very fashionable," said the sister, with a shake of the head. "At the Home, the sisters who are not engaged in night-watching go to their rooms at half-past eight."

"What a luxury!" Junia exclaimed.

Sister Agnes laughed. "Really I do not know but that you may make a good sister after all. That going to bed so early is a terrible trial to some of the probationary sisters."

Junia bid her adieu, feeling that, on the whole, she had succeeded in this preliminary interview better than she had any right to expect. On reaching her lodging she sat down at once and wrote a formal letter to the director of the Home, asking to be received on trial.

Two days after this she saw Mr Marsden.

"I have seen Sister Agnes," he said. "You have quite bewitched her."

"Have I?" said Junia. "She made a hundred objections."

"That was of course; but she thinks you

will do famously. You are so earnest, she says. That's their slang, you know," said he, pursing up his lips. "I suppose every profession has its slang. 'In earnest' is a grand phrase with them."

"But I really am in earnest; and she scarcely seemed to believe that it could be so."

"Of course. They are cautious about taking new hands—and quite right too. I only hope you won't live to repent the step you are taking. Good-bye. I'm in a hurry." And off he went, muttering to himself as he went along, "What queer animals women are! There's that handsome creature looking happier than I've ever seen her look yet, because she thinks they are going to make a sister of her! What an ill-regulated world this is! Why on earth can't the handsome people let themselves be as God made them! The idea of a woman like that hiding her head of hair under a prim cap! Dear, dear, dear, what an ill-regulated world this is!"

CHAPTER XIII.

In answer to her application, Junia received a prospectus containing the Society's rules, together with a courteous note from the director, saying that her name had been mentioned by Sister Agnes, and that if, after mature consideration of the code of rules enclosed, Junia desired to become a member of the sisterhood, he would be glad to hear from her.

Junia at once put on her bonnet, and went to Mr Marsden's house.

"What now?" was his greeting. "Have you changed your mind?"

Junia explained that she wished him to give her a certificate of good health, to take with her when she went to see the director. He hesitated.

"There is nothing the matter with you at present; but you know you were very much in need of nursing yourself but a short time ago. It seems rather soon to be turning nurse, does it not?"

"What made me break down?" said Junia, eagerly. "It was the constant excitement and fatigue and want of rest. But the sisters are not allowed to overwork themselves. Think of that, Mr Marsden."

"True. So you, a gentlewoman, freely embrace the loathsome life of a sick-nurse? Well, well, well!"

"I, a gentlewoman, shake off the loathsome life of a burlesque actress. That is my way of putting it, if you please, Mr Marsden."

He smiled. "You have the best of it, I grant;" and sat down and wrote the certificate.

"What is the name of the superior, father-confessor, or whatever they call the head of the establishment?"

"The director? Dr Liebkind."

"I remember. A clever man, I have heard. Here is the certificate."

Junia thanked him, and rose to go; but he detained her a moment.

"I think it would be as well that the director should know that you were suffering severely from overwork not long ago. May I trust you to tell him that?"

"Come with me to-morrow, and tell him yourself," said Junia.

Mr Marsden demurred, but finally allowed himself to be persuaded.

"Only don't ask me to come and see you take the veil; for that would be entirely against my principles; and I should be obliged to stand up and forbid the—banns—what do you call it? None but ugly old women should take the veil."

Junia assured him that these sisters did not wear veils, only caps; and went away laughing. And again did Mr Marsden declare to himself that there never was such an ill-regulated world as this. He was, nevertheless, punctual in keeping his appointment to go with her to the Home, which was in Prior's Place East.

Prior's Place East is one of those forgotten nooks which lie buried in the heart of the busy quarters of London. Once it had been a quiet, respectable nest of private residences; but gradually the private residences had been transformed into offices and warehouses; gardens once spacious had been built over; old trees stretched their thinly-covered heads out of spaces a few feet square; counting-house windows looked out on a triangular plot of ground studded with tombs and planted with sooty evergreens. Such was Prior's Place, of which the Home was No. 9.

Outside, there was nothing homelike about it. It was certainly gloomier and more dingy-looking than the neighbouring houses, which mostly possessed bright brass door-plates. Inside, it was dull, but not dingy; and there was an odour of cleanliness which gained Mr Marsden's heart at once.

"They don't grudge soap and water, I see," he said. And he also remarked with approval that he saw no stained windows yet.

When the director came in, Mr Marsden

introduced himself as one of the medical profession, and the conversation presently turned upon some abstruse technicalities connected therewith, Junia being given in charge of a sister who appeared almost immediately after the director. The sister proposed Junia's going through the house, and walked on with her.

"Here is our hospital," said the sister, as they stood at the door of an up-stairs room. She entered, and Junia followed, feeling shy and half afraid to look at the poor pale faces in the beds. She walked softly, feeling ashamed, too, at the rustling of her silk dress and the brightness of her fashionable bonnet. If she were ill, how she would dislike to have strange people rustling by her, she thought. But her shyness wore off when she entered the children's ward.

It was merely a large room in the upper storey. Here the children took it for granted that none but friends entered. The little ones held out their hands to clasp hers; one sickly wee thing tottered towards her, demanding to

be nursed; and curled its arms fearlessly round her neck when it was taken up.

"Do you know that child?" the sister asked.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"Because it came to you as if it knew you. Perhaps you are one of the people children take a fancy to. There are such."

"I have never had anything to do with children," said Junia.

"Indeed! You hold that child as if you had been used to children all your life."

Junia fondled the child in silence. Again she was being judged by appearances; and again appearances were deceptive. The director and Mr Marsden came in, and instantly fell into a learned discussion over a rare and complicated case. The sister directed Junia's attention to the garden, a square space with a grass plot and a solitary laurestinus in the middle, and surrounded by a high wall, black with grime and soot, except where the ivy and the Virginian creeper clung.

Here the convalescents were amusing them-

selves, children were playing, a grave sister walked slowly up and down, leading a lame child by the hand. The noise of a great thoroughfare came in like the sound of a distant sea.

"Here," thought Junia, "I may find a haven of rest. Here, living among the children, I may grow child-like. Seeing their perfect trustfulness, I may grow trustful too. Hope and faith and love may once more be realities to me. Surely, if God is to be found, I shall find Him here — here, where I shall strive for the rest of my life to imitate the Christ who went about doing good."

The two doctors had finished their discussion. Mr Marsden, watch in hand, came up to her.

"My time is up. If you have seen what you wished to see, I can go with you part of your way homeward. The children seem to have taken to you already."

For the wee child refused to part with her, and clung to her neck when she would have put it on the floor.

The director took it, gave it a toss, and put

it down, saying, "Sister Margaret, here is a lady who wishes to come among us."

"It is clear the children will be glad to have her," said the sister, smiling.

As Junia took her leave, the director informed her that the council would meet on the morrow; that her name would be submitted to it, and that she should hear the result.

Mr Marsden walked away with Junia—still not wholly satisfied. Presently she said, "How shall I ever thank you enough for helping me to this? Something tells me I shall find peace in that dingy old house—a peace which is not of this world."

"I wouldn't mind betting any money," said he, "that you will be tired of it in six weeks. Where you talk of finding peace you may perhaps only find stagnation. By the by, what will Mrs Marville say?"

"There will be a terrible scene, I fear; but I shall not tell her till I have actually entered the Home. I dare not expose myself to such strife as there would be between us were I to see her while the step is under consideration.

In leaving her I have the satisfaction of knowing that I have helped her to make money —of knowing that her kindness to me has enriched instead of impoverishing her."

"She is a good soul, but a queer temper, I should say."

"You may know something of her temper, but you can never know the heart that lies underneath it. Nobody knows Mrs Marville as I do," said Junia. Shortly after this they separated.

For two days Junia waited, full of a peaceful expectation. The weather was rainy and cold, and she remained indoors, reading. The book she read was Shakespeare.

Now that her energies were no longer to be devoted to burlesque, she could read with unmixed pleasure the noble speeches of Queen Katharine, of Portia; the charming repartees of Beatrice. Not long ago she could neither have read them nor heard them read without chafing in spirit. Now she repined no more at the fate which had forbidden her to represent characters such as these, and had forced

her against her will into the groove of burlesque; for at last a better portion had been meted out to her. "To tend the sick, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked," she thought, "is better than to be even a Siddons or a Ristori."

On the evening of the second day she received a note, appointing the day after, Friday, to meet the director and the council at the Home.

On that day Junia, resolved to take every precaution against being again mistaken for a fashionable young lady, dressed herself in a cheap dress of black stuff, such as she had worn before she went to Italy with June. On her way she passed Mr Marsden standing on his doorstep. "I am going to the Home," she said, gaily. "Won't you throw an old shoe after me for luck?"

"Well, I suppose you know best," said Mr Marsden. "I don't doubt the result. You will be admitted as probationary sister. But," he added, seriously, "if you find it does not answer, come and tell me. Don't stay

there to be made miserable. Promise me that."

Junia promised. "But I am not afraid. I am sure they are all too good to make me miserable," she said, nodding good-bye as she passed on.

At the Home she was shown into an anteroom, where she sat, what seemed to her, a long time, hearing sounds of conversation proceeding from a room close by. She had been waiting for more than an hour, when at length the director appeared.

She rose as he entered. He motioned her to be seated, turned her chair slightly towards the light, and seated himself in front of her, adjusting his spectacles as he did so, like a doctor who is about to examine a patient.

"Since yesterday," he began, in a slow, measured voice, "a circumstance has transpired which demands explanation."

"Explanation!" Junia repeated.

In the peculiarity of Dr Liebkind's manner of seating himself Junia had at the moment seen nothing more than the force of habit.

But his first words assured her that the action was trivial in appearance only. There was a purpose lurking behind it—an unfriendly one. Instantly she was on her guard. Her stage training enabled her to assume at once a calmness and impassibility of countenance that many a woman would have found impossible. "Explanation!" she said, in a tone of mild surprise, which (with the expression of her countenance) baffled Dr Liebkind.

He went on, still looking at her as if she were a patient under examination. "You must have been aware," he said, "both from the copy of printed rules with which you were furnished, and from the conversation we had on the day I saw you, that neither wealth, nor poverty, nor rank, is allowed to be a barrier to the admission of fit persons to the sisterhood." Here he stopped as if expecting an answer.

"I am aware that it is so." Every nerve in Junia's body was quivering now, and her heart was beating more wildly than it had ever beat on her first appearance before a

new and excited audience. The doctor's face, and the furniture in the room—everything—was waving up and down before her, just as the pit and boxes and gallery did on a first night. But she remained outwardly calm.

Dr Liebkind went on: "It must surely be evident to you that the characters of the members of our society should be absolutely free from reproach."

"Certainly!" She felt herself redden now under the director's persistent gaze. The blush was of anger, not of shame; and Junia would have kept it down if she could, for the director (she felt sure) would take it as a sign that his words woke shame in her.

She could interpret his words in one way only. The fact of her being the woman known to the theatre-going public as Angela Gabrielli, the burlesque actress, must in some unaccountable manner have become known to the director; and had been considered by him, or the council, or both, as an impediment to her joining the sisterhood. For herself alone Junia was not ashamed, and

would have stood up to defend her character, feeling conscious as she did, that all with whom she had associated since going on the stage — Mrs Marville to begin with — could speak to her perfect rectitude of conduct. But she could not think of herself only. Her thought in this juncture was of her sister Anna, so fearful of the blame, so desirous of the praise of this world—of the religious world above all; perhaps of that very section of it to which Junia herself was soliciting an entrance. What if this step of hers should do Anna any harm! she thought, with a sudden sinking of the heart.

"Fool!" she said to herself, "keep your blushes down! Be cool, be pale, for Anna's sake."

She waited, expecting the director's next words to be about her connection with the stage. Slowly he went on, dropping his words out, one by one. He had seen her blush, and had thought it to be the sign of an uneasy conscience—perhaps of a guilty one; and he was sorry for her.

"The sisters consider themselves the servants of the Church of Christ. The life of a sister, past as well as present, should be of unsullied purity."

"Undoubtedly!" Junia held her breath. It was coming now. Why did he not make haste and say what he had to say? Surely not so many words were needed to tell her that she, a pariah, could not be joined to this Brahmin community for the accomplishment of even the humblest good works. Yet, even as she waited, listening for the fatal words, she wondered how any one could have recognised her. For, this long time past, she, as she made up her face at night, could not recognise in the face that she saw in the glass the hollow-eyed, lustreless visage which met her gaze in the morning — the visage of a woman who had been beautiful.

Dr Liebkind continued: "I am bound to tell you that the knowledge of the circumstances to which I allude has not come to us at first-hand. Taking this into consideration, and on the other hand, taking into considera-

tion Mr Marsden's testimony of your respectability, I tell you frankly that your absolute denial will be enough for me. I can, of course, only answer for myself, not for the council."

"Pray let me know plainly of what I am accused," said Junia. "As far as I know, I have never done anything I need be ashamed of."

"Were you, or were you not, at one time a governess at a place called Nunehead?"

The surprise of a question so different from what she had been expecting, sent all the blood from her face back to her heart. Dr Liebkind mistook her pallor as he had mistaken her blushes. There must be something in this story about her, he thought. And again he felt sorry.

But, the instant's surprise over, Junia breathed more freely; and could answer with perfect self-possession, "Yes, I was there, some years ago."

"You are accused — I give the precise words of my informant," he said, referring

to his note-book — "of having violated the proprieties and the decencies of life at Nunehead Park, not long before you quitted it."

Junia started to her feet. "It is false!" she cried. "Every act, every word of mine while I was at Nunehead, will bear the strictest scrutiny. Who dares accuse me? I have a right to know."

"It is, I regret to say, an inmate of the Home. But you shall see her. We only wish to get at the truth—only the truth."

"The truth will never harm me," said Junia. "Only falsehood can do that."

The director rang a bell. It was evidently a preconcerted signal.

Sister Agnes entered and, going at once to Junia, shook her by the hand. Junia felt that the grasp was that of a friend, and returned it warmly.

"It was to you, was it not, that an assertion was made affecting Miss Berrington's character?" said the director, fixing his eyes on Sister Agnes.

She reddened up to her cap-border as she answered, "Yes."

"Miss Berrington declares there is no truth whatever in those assertions."

"I never believed them to be true. I told you so at the time," said the sister.

"But you have not yet told me what I am accused of," said Junia.

"Be so good, Sister Agnes, as to repeat to Miss Berrington exactly what was said to you," said the director.

Again Sister Agnes reddened, and looked from the director to Junia, and back again to the director, without speaking.

He signed to her to proceed.

"If I must, I must," she said, after an instant's hesitation. "I beg your pardon beforehand," she added, turning to Junia. "Please remember that the words are not mine, and that I could not help their being said to me, and that I only repeat them in obedience to the director's order. The words were—forgive me—that, if you were the Junia Berring-

ton who formerly lived at Nunehead Park—" here she stopped short.

"Go on, Sister Agnes, if you please," said Dr Liebkind.

"Your place was—not in a sisterhood, but in a house—in some such house—that is—as Clewer, for instance. Not among the sisters. That was what she said."

"But who? Who?" was all Junia could say.

"It was sister Wilhelmina."

"Wilhelmina what? Her other name?"

"Her family name is Stubbes."

"Miss Stubbes! Sister Agnes, it cannot be. It is impossible."

"I assure you, Miss Berrington, she did say those things to me."

Junia went on. "It cannot — cannot be. Sister Agnes, I knew her years ago at Florence, where I was born, and where my family lived till my father's death. Oh, she cannot have so spoken of me, surely, surely!"

Sister Agnes nodded her head. "I have not exaggerated a word."

"Then I must see her now—at once—and ask her how she, an old acquaintance, could utter such a libel against me."

"You have a right to ask that, most certainly," said Dr Liebkind.

Again he touched the bell, desiring the person who answered it to send Sister Wilhelmina.

Presently Miss Stubbes entered. Tall and gaunt, with her grey hair smoothed back under her cap, she looked more respectable, but scarcely less vixenish, than in the days when she had contributed to the amusement of Florentine society by her drooping ringlets, her double eye-glass, and her brilliantly-toned complexion.

"Miss Stubbes!" Junia exclaimed, confronting her.

Miss Stubbes stared, but gave no sign of recognition.

"You do not remember me?" said Junia.

"Not in the least," was the answer; and as

she spoke she stepped up to the director, so turning herself as to stand almost with her back to Junia. "Doctor, I was told you sent for me."

"Sister Wilhelmina, this is Miss Berrington. She absolutely denies the truth of what you said to Sister Agnes."

Miss Stubbes turned round and stared again at Junia. "So that is Miss Berrington! And she denies it, does she?"

"*In toto.* It rests with you to prove the accuracy of your statement."

"Prove the accuracy! Why, doctor! perhaps she will deny that she was at Nunehead. I shouldn't wonder if she did. Prove the accuracy!" Miss Stubbes repeated, angrily.

"I certainly shall not deny that I was at Nunehead," said Junia; "but I deny that my conduct there was in any way unbecoming a gentlewoman."

The red-faced anger of the accuser, and the quiet self-possession of the accused, were wonderful to see.

"Ah!" Miss Stubbes rejoined, staring hard

at Junia, "I had good warrant for every word I said."

But Junia bore the stare undisturbed. Whatever the inquiry or the doubt respecting her, it was taking a turn away from aught prejudicial to Anna's interests. Seeing this, the calmness, at first feigned, was quickly becoming reality.

Sister Agnes, at the first word spoken by Miss Stubbes, had moved a step nearer, and laid her hand on the back of Junia's chair. Junia (who saw from Miss Stubbes's manner that old acquaintance had not prevented her from becoming an enemy) turned to the director, saying, "Will you ask Miss Stubbes to produce her authority?"

"My authority?" Miss Stubbes replied, with great alacrity; "a distant connection of my own, Mrs Pownall—formerly Miss Kate Smith—who saw you with her own eyes. Oh, you wicked, wicked woman!"

From the back of Junia's chair Sister Agnes's hand moved to Junia's shoulder, and rested there.

Dr Liebkind raised his hand, saying, with cold severity, "Sister Wilhelmina, be so good as to confine yourself to facts. We want facts, not vituperation."

Junia spoke. "Dr Liebkind, I wish you would write and ask Mrs Pownall for her account of what she saw with her own eyes."

"Upon my word!" Miss Stubbes broke in, with a gasp; "the effrontery of some people! Why, Kate saw her brother kissing you!—actually kissing you!—in the schoolroom, on a Sunday morning. She declared to me on her word of honour that when she opened the schoolroom door she saw it — actually and positively saw it; and she thought she would have fainted. And there was Mrs Percy Smith bowed down with grief and sorrow—prostrated with watching over that poor child that died." Miss Stubbes gasped for breath and went on: "And you, you designing woman — yes, I will say it! — were at that instant clothed from head to foot at the family's expense in the very best of mourning. Kate declared that your mourning was

as good as her own. With the child scarcely cold in her grave, to behave in that way, as Kate said; and it was not the first of your goings on, that she was sure of. And now, to think of your coming here, and wanting to be a sister! oh, really——"

"The child died," said Junia, addressing Dr Liebkind, as Miss Stubbes paused for breath; "but it was I, not Mrs Percy Smith, who nursed it. From the beginning of the illness she never came near the room, because of the other children."

Miss Stubbes continued: "While the poor wife was prostrated, this—person—made use of her opportunities to steal Mr Percy Smith's affections. And, another thing, doctor, after this—person—was gone, empty wine-bottles were found in the schoolroom cupboard. I know that is so, because Kate found them herself. I quite agreed with her that that was a most suspicious circumstance. And besides this, there was some mystery about a cheque. What it was Kate never found out exactly; but a mystery there was. She would

have inquired into it, but she feared making things unpleasant between her brother and his wife. Now that is what I have to say about Miss Berrington; and if, after that, you consider her a fit person to associate on equal terms with the ladies in this sisterhood, all I can say is, that I shall take the first opportunity of tendering my resignation to the council."

"You must act as you see fit about that," said the director.

There was a pause. Junia spoke first.

"Dr Liebkind, will you, for the sake of truth and justice, write yourself to Mr Percy Smith, and ask him to clear up all that is said to be mysterious respecting the cheque, and the wine-bottles in the schoolroom cupboard, and—his kissing me? May I ask Miss Stubbes one or two questions?"

"Surely, surely," was the director's answer.

"Then, Miss Stubbes, will you say whether Miss Kate Smith told you that in the month of November I was recovering from the fever I caught in nursing the child that died?"

"I cannot say whether she told me so or not."

"Did she tell you that I had nursed her for three days before I fell ill myself?"

"Indeed she told me nothing of the kind."

"Did she tell you that, on her entering the schoolroom that morning to which you have alluded, I appealed to her for protection against her brother's impertinence?"

"I am sure she told me nothing of the kind," said Miss Stubbes.

"Nor, I suppose, did she tell you that after having scourged me,—defenceless as I was in every way,—with the cruellest words one woman can say to another, she accompanied her brother and his wife to church, remaining, as they all did," said Junia, after a pause, "for the Communion."

Junia felt that so far the director and Sister Agnes were both on her side. Miss Stubbes, also, felt that they were against her, and broke forth volubly in her own self-defence: "Dr Liebkind, this does not alter what I have said one iota. The facts remain.

Mrs Pownall told me she was as certain that there was an attempt on Miss Berrington's part to steal her brother's affections as she could be of anything. And I can assure you, sir, of my own knowledge, that Mr Percy Smith is a most worthy, benevolent man. He has restored the parish church at a vast expense; he has put in a stained window to his child's memory; he is respected everywhere; he is a magistrate, and a most affectionate husband and father; exemplary in all his family relations."

"And proved it," said Junia, with a contempt which overbore every other feeling— "proved it by kissing his children's governess! What of that? I was, as Miss Stubbes said truly, dressed from head to foot in mourning that he had paid for. And he paid me forty pounds a-year — less than half of what he paid the housekeeper. My education had been a costly one, you might know that, Miss Stubbes; but governesses were a drug in the market, and I suppose housekeepers were not. And so it did not matter how little

observance was shown me. I was only worth forty pounds a-year; and he was a millionaire —that was all. If I had been a wealthy young lady instead of a poor one, do you suppose he would have ventured to kiss me? I trow not. But I was poor—was working for my bread as hard as the poorest servant; ay, was less regarded than any servant in that rich house! But I was bound to regard myself; and therefore, having no mind to chance a repetition of the impertinence which had been offered me, I left my situation."

There was a murmur of assent from the director and Sister Agnes.

"I suppose you don't want me any longer, do you?" said Miss Stubbes. "I can't say anything more, except this, that I was told all this by Mrs Pownall, and that Mrs Pownall is a person who knows what she is talking about."

"You can retire if you please, Sister Wilhelmina," said the director.

She walked out of the room without looking at Junia. As soon as she was gone the direc-

tor said : " I told you at first that we did not receive hearsays as evidence. All this is unpleasant certainly, but it is not evidence. Do you still wish the inquiry to be made that you were asking for ? "

" I wish it with all my heart and soul," said Junia. " I have everything to gain by it, and nothing to lose. I think—yes, I think even Miss Kate Smith would be sorry if she knew what mischief had been done by her cruel, ill-considered words. And I am sure Mr Percy Smith would be sorry, and would be the first to do me justice. The worst charge I can bring against him is, that he reduced everything—even courtesy and respect—to a money standard. And as I told you, my salary was but forty pounds a-year. But he will be sorry —he is a kind-hearted sort of man ; and his wife is a just woman—hard, but just. Come with me," Junia cried with sudden eagerness. " You, Sister Agnes, or you, Dr Liebkind—come with me, and hear them say they are sorry, and that I never did anything wrong! I am not afraid."

"I will go with you," said Sister Agnes.

The director made a gesture of disapproval. "You may be wanted here, sister. I could better be spared than you, though my duties in the Home are onerous enough. Still," he continued, "as it seems that a very unfounded charge has been brought by an inmate of the Home, it might be a satisfaction to Miss Berrington to have it refuted in the presence of some one who belongs to the Home in as great a degree as the sister who brought it."

"It will be the only way of stopping the calumny," said Sister Agnes.

"I have the greatest desire to see justice done," the director continued. "I speak for myself; but of course the council will be equally desirous." He rose, and bowing slightly, left the room.

Sister Agnes whispered, "Don't go yet. Wait till he comes back, or till I come back," and left the room after him.

CHAPTER XIV.

For half an hour Junia sat still, listening to the hum of voices in eager conversation in the next room. Then came a lull; the door slammed on the last occupant, and the whole place seemed to be empty and deserted. So empty, so deserted, that in the silence Junia thought she could hear her own heart beat. But she was not impatient. She had waited —if that can be called waiting which has not hope to sustain it—for years. She could well afford to wait a little longer, till the very few words should be said which should clear up the atmosphere of mystery and suspicion which hung round her—which had been raised first by Miss Kate Smith, and was now being spread by Miss Stubbes.

Afternoon had become evening, when a

serving sister entered who handed her a note.

Junia opened and read it. She had to read it twice before its full sense became plain to her.

Her application was refused by the council. Not because the council believed the alleged stain on her character. The council believed nothing which was unsupported by proper evidence. But because in a community such as this it was desirable that no whisper of scandal should be breathed against any of the inmates. And, unfortunately, it appeared that scandal had already been tampering with Miss Berrington's name. Therefore, by a majority of the council, Miss Berrington's application to be received into the sisterhood was rejected.

Sister Agnes entered hurriedly. "O Miss Berrington, I never expected this; I did not, indeed. When Sister Wilhelmina said what she said to me I did not believe her. I could not help telling the director; but I did not believe her, and I wished her to be stopped

from saying such things. Pray do not be angry with me."

The note had fallen to the ground, and Junia's eyes were fixed on it. "Will you not speak to me, and say you are not angry?" said Sister Agnes, half crying.

Junia looked up. "Will the director go to Nunehead with me?"

"I fear not. His time is quite taken up by his duties to the society. Had your application been entertained, perhaps he would have gone."

"Will you go with me? You said you would."

"I would go instantly if I had permission. But I know it is useless to ask for leave of absence now, for I, among others in the house, have been told to hold myself ready to start at a quarter of an hour's notice to attend on fever patients. There is an outbreak of fever not far from here, and we expect a time of trial and hard work. You must understand how I am bound by our rules."

"I understand," said Junia, and she rose

to go. "I think I will go to Nunehead by myself. I have the money now; years ago I had not."

"Wherever you go, may God go with you," said the sister as she kissed her.

"Ah!" cried Junia, half impatient, half imploring, "that is just it! Will God go with me? That is what I want to know. For the world is so cold—so hard—so unjust. And Mr Percy Smith does what he likes, and now Miss Stubbes calls me names. If I had been wicked it would be a good penance for me to be called names before other people. But I have done nothing wicked, so the penance does me no good."

"My dear—my poor ill-used dear!" said Sister Agnes. "But do not lose heart."

"No, not if I can help it."

"If you want to nurse the poor you can do it alone, you know."

"That is true."

"And you may do better for being alone, perhaps. To-day I feel trammelled, because

of the rule of obedience. For the heads of the house say, 'Wait here,' and my heart prompts me to go to Nunehead with you."

"I understand the rule of obedience better than you think, perhaps," said Junia. Then the two kissed each other and parted.

CHAPTER XV.

Outside Prior's Place, Junia stood for a moment, thinking. She remembered that Mr Marsden had wished to know the result of her visit to the Home. She would go to him, and ask him to help her to begin to work among the poor by herself. She knew that she would be obliged to live very frugally; but she would have food enough, and sufficient clothing and shelter; and she was not anxious for non-essentials. To do good works seemed to be the greatest necessity of her life now.

Some such beginning once decided on, she thought she would go to Nunehead. Whatever came of her going there, she would not feel quite settled at any kind of work till she had been there.

The street, which had been so crowded when Junia made her way through it to the Home some hours before, was becoming deserted. Business was over, shutters were being put up, warehouse-doors locked. Prior's Place was going to sleep till to-morrow. Junia looked at her watch, and seeing the lateness of the hour, called a cab, and drove to Mr Marsden's.

He had been called out in a hurry, the housekeeper said. "People are contrary, as usual. All because I had a roast leg of lamb for him. If it had been cold mutton now, they'd have let him have his dinner in peace. There's a note for you, miss, as I was going to send the boy with to your lodgings. Perhaps you'll take it."

The note ran as follows :—

"I am just called out to see Mrs Marville by a person of the name of Bunce, who tells me she has been ever since yesterday in a state bordering on distraction owing to money

losses. He fears a fit of some sort. Mrs Marville, it seems, takes your prolonged absence (in Italy) exceedingly ill.—Yours,

"J. M."

The address of Mrs Marville's lodging was scribbled lower down. Junia took a cab and drove there immediately.

As she entered she met Mr Marsden and Jemmy Bunce coming down-stairs. Jemmy's face lighted up when he saw her. "Miss Gabrielli, you are a godsend to us all," he cried, shaking both her hands.

"Is she very ill?" Junia asked of Mr Marsden.

He explained shortly what Mrs Marville's present state was. There was not much to fear, he said, if she could be kept quiet; but a state of high excitement was dangerous to a person of her full habit. He summed up her case in a few words, and then said, "But what is the matter with you?" For the change in Junia's demeanour had not escaped him.

"It is not much. I may tell you another time," she said, and passed on.

"I'll wait a moment," he said. "I suppose you won't stay long."

Mrs Marville was lying on a sofa. She cried aloud when Junia entered. "Oh, my dear, my love, all my money's gone! My money that I worked so hard for, and had put out to such good interest! All gone, all gone!"

"Ah," said Jemmy Bunce, shaking his head wisely, "I always told you so, ma'am; I always told you that high interest was a risky thing."

But Mrs Marville took no notice of him. "My money, that I thought would make me so comfortable in my old age! It's all gone —every farthing, they tell me. And I can get no redress. I've been swindled, and I shall have to end my days in the workhouse. Oh, I shall break my heart—I know I shall!"

Junia sat down beside her and took her hand. "No, no, no," she said, as if she were talking to a sick child. "My dear old woman

shall not break her heart. If the money is gone we will work for more. You must make haste and get well, dear, and then we will begin again. We will go round the world together."

"Will you?" said Mrs Marville, wiping her eyes. "Do you mean it, really? Because I know you've been fighting shy of that for months. I've said so to Jemmy scores of times."

"I mean it," said Junia.

Jemmy Bunce cried "Hurrah!" And Mrs Marville suddenly rose and kissed, him first, and then Junia.

"We're saved, Jemmy! I'm saved, that is. We'll see about farewell nights at once. Go round to the costumier in Bow Street the first thing to-morrow, Jemmy, and order those new burlesque dresses I was talking of."

Mr Marsden waited no longer. "Mrs Marville," he said, "let me remind you that you have been on the verge of a serious illness, and that it will be in your own interest to

keep quiet for a day or two. Good evening. With a bow he descended hastily to the street.

"If there's an unfathomable mystery in creation, it is that thing which a woman calls her mind," he muttered, as he went back to his spoilt dinner.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Marchese had died believing that the work was done. Carlo had lived to find that the burden and heat of the day were yet to come, and that there were but few steadfast enough to bear it.

In the despondent moments common to all who possess keener vision than the herd of men, it seemed to Carlo that his countrymen were not worthy of the freedom they had hailed with such frantic enthusiasm. Speaking his thoughts out bravely, he had been repaid by the unpopularity which is usually awarded to the honest souls who dare doubt the infallibility of the *plebs*. He retired, mortified and disappointed, to obscurity, and to the improvement of his tenants and his estates.

Of this Sisyphus labour, a book might be written; but there is no place for it here. Thus much may be said, that Carlo, in the prosecution of his educational schemes, found ample exercise for all the virtues; particularly of that arch-Tuscan virtue—patience.

At length the tide turned again; and Carlo was remembered and sought after as the man who had dared to speak the truth. He thought himself happy to accept the offer of a confidential post from the head of the new Cabinet. It was a place of small emolument, of little honour, and of hard work. The only drawback to it, in Carlo's mind, was, that he could not tell Junia of it all. He had his moments of encouragement, and his moments of discouragement and weariness, like all men who cannot help putting their heart into their work, even when that work includes a good deal of routine. It was during a time of such weariness that he received a letter from Signora Isabella which sent the blood coursing through his veins as from a draught of strong wine.

After detailing the meeting with Junia at

Dittisham, the signora went on as follows: "It is but right that I should tell you that she is changed—so changed that I could weep as I look at her, remembering how I used at Florence to look on her as the incarnation of eternal youth and beauty: a creature never to be touched by sorrow or sickness or age. And the child I loved so dearly now bears the mark of all three. I ask myself, Will the magician Love efface those lines? They never could remain on a happy woman's face. I believe it all rests with you. Be sure of this, that she loves you still; else why should her colour come and go when I mention your name? But will you think it worth your while to win her? for her beauty is fast fading away."

It was Carlo's turn now to find that the public is a hard taskmaster. On requesting leave of absence, he was made to understand that it was not to be had on any terms for the present. To throw up his appointment he felt would be an act as ungracious as it was unbecoming. There was nothing for it but to await the convenience of his chief.

In her disappointment at Junia's apparently wilful frustration of her well-meant attempt to bring them together, Signora Isabella had not written again to Carlo; and she was as much grieved as the aborigines of Dittisham were surprised, to see an English-speaking, small-footed little foreigner descend from the mail-cart on a breezy afternoon, and make his way straight for Mrs Anderson's house. In her lagging footsteps, as she advanced to meet him, Carlo received a foretaste of disappointment and failure. "Where is she?" was the only question he could ask.

The signora, deeply mortified, could only say that Junia had gone to Liverpool to meet her brother, and that she had not heard from her since, with the exception of one letter, which, however, gave no clue to her future movements.

"My husband tells me I am a meddlesome old woman," said the signora; "and he blames me for mentioning Junia's name to you. But, knowing your feeling towards her, how could I help doing so?"

Carlo raised her hand to his lips. "Dear signora, I shall never blame you for acting as I would wish my mother to have done."

"Ah, but Paolo does not see it in that light at all," she said, shaking her head—comforted, however, by Carlo's gratitude.

It was not without trepidation that Signora Isabella informed her husband of the object of Carlo's visit to England.

"He must be prevented from throwing himself away in this manner," said the wise man. "He is quite mad to think of such a marriage. He forgets what he owes his country."

"But you cannot prevent him. I told him truly that Junia's beauty was fading away. If that has not prevented his coming to England to ask her to marry him, nothing will prevent his marrying her except Junia herself."

Signor Paolo repeated that Carlo must be prevented from throwing himself away; and if friendly remonstrance could prevail, he was the man to remonstrate. The signora trembled inwardly at hearing this, and kept out of the

way of Carlo in the most cowardly manner. For though she longed, yet she feared, to tell him what was coming.

She would have been as much relieved as surprised had she had any idea of the small effect her husband's remonstrance would have on Carlo. He heard with complete calmness all Signor Paolo's appeals to his patriotism, which (in his old tutor's opinion) imperatively required him to marry an Italian belonging to some family of present political influence. Then he said,—quite unmoved by the eloquent picture drawn by Signor Paolo of the Italy of the future, when no man should say, "I am Tuscan," "I am Piedmontese," but, "I am Italian,"—"That is all very well, dear Paolo; but a man owes something to himself. This is no new whim of mine. It is a wish as old as my boyhood."

"An error being old in date," Signor Paolo resumed, "is no reason for perseverance in it. Let emotion wait on reason, not reason on emotion."

"It is strange," said Carlo, not without

emotion himself, "that you of all people should have taken a dislike to Junia."

Signor Paolo asked, irritably, what had his likes or dislikes to do with her fitness or unfitness as a wife for the last Falconieri? "Even were she Italian, it does not follow that she would make you a desirable wife. Your wife should have no history but yours; no will but yours. Junia Berrington has her own history; her own will; ay, her own secrets; unless Lavater and I are much mistaken."

"Lavater!" said Carlo, disdainfully. "Why do you not trust your common-sense?"

But Signor Paolo thought he had made an impression on him, and repeated, "Ay, her own secrets. I tell you that she is a woman with a fixed idea of some sort. She is at war with the world, and she holds God in disdain. She has forgotten how to smile."

"You misapprehend her so entirely," said Carlo, "that I do not know whether to laugh at you or call you out. I tell you that if Junia has forgotten how to smile—poor girl!—it will

be my object in life henceforth to teach her to smile again."

Signor Paolo rose and threw away his cigar. "I have done my duty," he cried, walking swiftly towards the house (they were on the beach at this time). "I might have known it would be of no use. You will never be an Italian, Carlo; never anything better than a narrow-minded Tuscan."

"Amen," said Carlo, fervently. "I might be worse."

"Ay, marry Junia, and repent. I do not believe she can be in her right mind. What sane woman would go away as she did, when she might have stayed and tormented a man by saying 'no,' when he wanted her to say 'yes'?"

With this Parthian shot Signor Paolo fled into the house. Carlo lit another cigar and remained outside, where presently Signora Isabella joined him.

"Thou art not angry, Carlo *mio?*" she said, humbly.

"Nay, signora *mia*—only somewhat grieved

that one so good as Paolo should misapprehend so utterly."

"He means well. And he is very wise, my Carlo."

"Too wise by half. I wish he would let Lavater alone."

"But Lavater was a very great man," said the signora, who, however, felt that she could well have dispensed with him in her scheme of creation.

"He was an old fool," said Carlo.

Before they separated Signora Isabella inquired what his plans were.

"I could get but ten days' leave of absence," Carlo replied. "Had Junia been here that would have been ample time for me to have come to an understanding with her. As our meeting is deferred, I can but go back to my work. I know my chief is anxiously awaiting my return to send me to Turin about some matters I have had to do with. In fact, I shall take Turin on my way back, unless I get a telegram to the contrary. I shall try to find out Anna's address when I reach Lon-

don. June's return to England may lead to a patching-up of the family quarrel, whatever it is."

"Take this," said the signora, giving him a folded paper. "It is the letter Junia wrote me from Liverpool. It is so sad that I did not intend at first to let you see it. But now I think you will like to have it."

Carlo read the letter when alone in his room—the room which, as he was told, Junia had occupied when she was at Dittisham.

"If," she wrote, "Carlo loved me less than you tell me he does, or if I esteemed him less, perhaps I might have stayed at Dittisham, instead of going away to avoid meeting him. But I believe that in thus avoiding him I have done him a kindness. I know myself too well to hope that a single trace remains of the girl Junia whom he loved. Had I ever hoped it, that hope would have vanished after meeting you and Signor Paolo. Alas! all these years I have been out in the world I have eaten the bread of servitude, and have spoken as my masters would have me speak. I feel

myself grown hard and ungracious and rough, by reason of walking in hard, toilsome paths. I have learnt to repay scorn with scorn. I had almost written that I had learnt to repay deceit with deceit, and hatred with hatred. My life is full of labour, and empty, almost, of love, save what June sends me from the other side of the Atlantic, and that has seemed lately to grow cold in coming, so that it is indeed time I should see his face, lest he too should forget me. I am a woman whose mind has known the torture of doubt—of doubt whether 'God' and 'Love' and 'Justice' be more than empty names. Such a woman is not the woman to be Carlo's wife.

"And how do you know, though you declared he loved me, that he may not, even while you spoke, have changed his mind?"

"May I keep that letter?" Carlo asked, when he was taking leave of Signora Isabella the next day.

She assented, giving him, at the same time, an Italian book which Junia had left behind her.

Carlo bid her adieu, saying, "If you see or hear of Junia before I do, be sure to tell her I have not changed my mind."

During his journey to London, Carlo took the book out of his pocket to look at it. It had seemed, as he first held it in his hand, to bear the aspect of an old friend; and he found that it was indeed so—that it was a book he had often handled. It was a copy of the 'Convito,' bound in white parchment, which Junia had picked up one day at the stalls under the Uffizi. On the fly-leaf were Junia's initials, fancifully executed by himself in red ink. Opposite was a drawing of Dante's head, done by June. The book opened of itself as it lay in Carlo's hand, and scorings in red chalk on the margin of a page attracted his attention. He read the passages thus marked, as follows:—

"Ah! would it had pleased the Disposer of all things that this excuse had never been needed — that neither others had done me wrong, nor myself undergone penalty undeservedly,—the penalty, I say, of exile and

poverty! . . . I have wandered . . . a stranger, almost a beggar, exposing, against my will, the wounds given me by fortune, too often unjustly imputed to the sufferer's fault. Truly I have been a vessel without sail and without rudder, driven about upon different ports and shores by the dry wind that springs out of dolorous poverty; and hence have I appeared vile in the eyes of many, who, perhaps, by some better report, had conceived of me a different impression, and in whose sight not only has my person become debased, but an unworthy opinion been created of everything which I did, or which I had to do. . . ."

At the end of this extract was one word in Junia's handwriting—"Sheffield."

CHAPTER XVII.

FROM his old acquaintance Mrs Calvert, at Chester Terrace, Carlo learnt that Anna—Mrs Cyril Calvert—was staying with her two children at her aunt's house in Grosvenor Square. To Grosvenor Square Carlo went, and was admitted.

In a boudoir fragrant with the breath of exotics, sparkling with mirrors, resplendent with all that pampers the lust of the eye, or flatters the pride of life, Anna sat, a lovely mother in the heyday of youth and happiness, with her two boys at her knee.

She moved at the voice of the footman who announced Carlo. She rose to meet her old friend as he advanced, with a face from which the brightness had all departed. She looked faded; she looked old; she looked full of care,

watchful, intent, on the alert. This was but for a moment. With the first words spoken a mask seemed to cover up her expression of care and watchfulness; she subsided on the soft seat from which she had risen—a fashionable woman with a fashionable smile.

Languidly she conversed; languidly she informed Carlo that her cousin Lady Crewkerne, and her aunt Mrs Odynell, were not on good terms, and that in consequence, her aunt, who was getting somewhat infirm, depended on her for help to go through her social duties. "I come up when she has an unusually heavy batch of entertainments to get through. It is rather a tax on me, as I have many home-duties, many calls on my time. And whenever I am away my husband overworks himself," said Anna, with an ethereal sigh. "And where are you staying, Carlo?"

All this time Carlo had had the question on his lips, "Where is Junia?" but Anna's continuous flow of talk had given him no opportunity of uttering it, except by a ruthless

interruption. He said, "I am staying at the Popinjay; but——"

Anna was galvanised for an instant. "My dear Carlo! The Popinjay! What makes you go to the Popinjay? Those railway hotels are not *bon ton*. Forgive me, as an old friend, for telling you."

"O Anna, never mind that now!" Carlo cried, out of patience. "I came to ask you about Junia. Where is she?"

Anna's face flushed for an instant. She looked down, and turned the rings on her fingers round and round, as she answered, slowly, "I cannot tell you anything about her."

"You cannot tell me? Why is that?"

"I cannot tell you that either."

"Did she tell you not to tell me—anything about her?"

Anna hesitated for a moment; then said, "No."

"Then indeed, Anna, you are not justified in not telling me where she is."

"May I ask why you wish to know? What

can you have to say to Junia? Of course you need not tell me unless you like."

"What your husband said to you when he found he could not exist without you. What else should I have to say to her? It is no new story that I want her to be my wife."

As Carlo spoke Anna's imperturbability deserted her. She rose and paced up and down the room. "I would give—I know not what — that I could tell you where she is! Why, why was she so obstinate, so headstrong? If she had but let herself be guided by me! These family estrangements are sad, cruel things. It seems almost impossible, when I look back a few years, that Junia and I should have drifted away from each other as we have. Yet so it is."

"I heard from Signora Isabella that there was an estrangement of some sort. Junia gave her to understand as much. But, now that June has come back, I thought it possible and probable that there would be a reconciliation; for I know that of old you were much attached to each other."

"It is news to me that June is come back. You see how I am kept in the dark," said Anna, becoming red and white by turns. "He might have written, I think. But of course he took Junia's side; and I cannot blame him. Whether we are ever to be on intimate terms again rests entirely with Junia."

She listened eagerly while Carlo repeated all that Signora Isabella had been able to tell him about Junia. The tears came into her eyes as he spoke of her as being changed and in bad health from overwork.

"It occurs to me," said Carlo, "that I may perhaps find out where she is by inquiring at Nunehead. The Smiths may know her address, though she is no longer with them."

"It will not be of the slightest use to go to Nunehead," said Anna, hastily. "It would be mere loss of time. The people there could tell you nothing about her."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure. I know it as a fact that she dropped all communication with them after she had left."

Carlo was silent for a moment. "I could never have believed that I should have to go back to Florence without seeing Junia," he said at length. "Can you give me June's address?"

"He was at Maple Valley, Hastings County, when last I heard from him. But that is years ago," said Anna.

"But a letter might find him, even if he has left that place."

"It might, of course," said Anna. "But I know he did not intend to stay there. Indeed he told me he was going to move further west as soon as he could. He meant to take a Government grant somewhere out in the wilds. I do not know whether he did so or not."

Carlo left her, feeling dissatisfied with her, he scarcely knew why.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SIGNORA ISABELLA *to* MARCHESE CARLO FALCONIERI.

MY DEAR CARLO,—On our return to London I took the earliest opportunity of going to see Anna, according to your request. I was all the more inclined to go, as it was possible she might be more communicative to me respecting Junia than she had been to you. I need not give the details of our interview. Suffice it to say that, when I mentioned (as a kind of forlorn-hope) my idea—and yours—of going down to Nunehead to make inquiries with a view of finding out Junia's present whereabouts, Anna's opposition was so strenuous as to make me imagine for a moment that she had some private reason for wishing Junia's friends not to come in contact with the people

at Nunehead. After debating for a day or two, I resolved to go down to Nunehead, as the best mode of satisfying myself and you too.

I went. I had heard of the magnificence of Nunehead Park, but no description could come up to the reality of the place. The owner, I was told, was a successful iron merchant; or, as my informant expressed it, "in the iron way." Truly I wished that my Paolo could be for a little while "in the iron way." What luxury for him, not to have to count the cost of a book, or the expense of printing even a pamphlet! Truly in this age iron is king.

I asked to see the mistress of the house; and after an interval of waiting in a hall, fitted from floor to ceiling with pictures in magnificent frames, was shown into a hot room, where a tall, sickly-looking woman sat by the fire, huddled up in a shawl. This was Mrs Percy Smith. I told my business promptly.

"Miss Berrington's address!" she cried. "The very thing I have been wishing to

know myself ever since my illness! I want her to come back to me as companion. She is an excellent nurse, and I would pay her any salary she might name, to get her to stay with me."

At this moment two ladies entered the room; both tall, handsome, and flushed with health and exercise, and so like each other that I took them for mother and daughter. They exclaimed simultaneously as they entered, "This room is suffocating!"

The younger lady ran to the window and would have opened it.

"Georgie, I won't have the window opened!" the sick woman cried, in a voice at once imperious and querulous. The young lady shrugged her shoulders, muttered, "As you please, mamma," and turned away. This, then, was Mrs Percy Smith's daughter, Junia's pupil. I looked at her with some interest, wishing to see what sort of girl my pupil Junia had been able to turn out. I am bound to say that my first impression was not favourable. And (as I looked) I seemed to have seen this girl

somewhere before, which I knew was impossible. This puzzled me. Before I could solve the puzzle, the young lady, with a muttered complaint at the heat, left the room.

The elder lady threw off a country hat and a knitted shawl she wore, sat down, and began to talk.

"How are you to-day, Maria?"

The invalid sighed deeply as she answered, "Worse, I think. I don't believe I shall ever be better in this world."

"Oh, that's all nonsense, Maria. You shouldn't let yourself think such things."

"I can't help it," was the reply. "Here I remain, day after day, and nobody comes near me but my maid. Georgie says the room smells so of ether that it makes her faint. And you are always in such a hurry to be off whenever you do come, or else wanting me to do something I don't like." The poor sickly creature's sigh at the end of this complaint went to my heart. Had I been free, I think I should have offered myself, then and there, as companion and nurse.

"What a pity," I said, "that you did not know some weeks ago that Miss Berrington was at Dittisham! She was out of a situation then, and probably you might have engaged her."

Tears of disappointment and vexation stood in the invalid's eyes. "To think she was so near, and I did not know! It seems done on purpose to worry me. What would I not give to have her now, to read to me, and give me what I want!"

"Perhaps," said the lady addressed as Kate, "when you had her you would give a great deal to get rid of her."

"Ah, you have said that before. But you were always prejudiced against Miss Berrington — always. But," said Mrs Percy Smith, turning to me, "I know what governesses are; and I know that Miss Berrington is one of a thousand. It is a rare thing to meet with a person whose manners one can in all respects desire one's children to copy. Now Miss Berrington was just such a person."

I smiled inwardly as I assented. For, con-

sidering the careful bringing up which Junia had had, it would have been wonderful indeed had she appeared to be anything but a gentlewoman, and a highly bred one too.

The lady named Kate laughed. "If her morals were as good as her manners, there would be no objection to her, on my part. But of course you will please yourself, Maria. This is your own house."

"Of course I shall please myself," was the answer, given with much irritability. "And it is too bad of you to say such things, Kate. I wonder you don't think how it sounds; and you a clergyman's wife too! I believe you were jealous of her, that's all."

"Jealous!" And again the lady named Kate laughed,—such a hard, discordant laugh, that it jarred on every nerve I possessed. And it was a laugh not new to me either. I had experienced the same sensation from just such a laugh as this long before. But when, and where?

Mrs Percy Smith continued, with increasing heat (you will have remarked that these two

ladies did not throw away the small coin of civility upon each other), "Yes, you were jealous, just as you used to be jealous of Georgie, because of course Georgie was years younger than you, and nobody could help seeing it. But mind this, Kate, if Miss Berrington does come back to me, I won't have her snubbed by you or anybody else."

"If Miss Berrington comes back I shall behave exactly as I see fit, Maria," was the answer, given with—as I thought—a coolness that must have been infinitely irritating to the sick woman. However, their squabbles mattered very little to me. What I wanted was to get a good view of the person whose laugh I seemed to recognise. In order to make her turn her face towards me, I addressed her.

"It is a serious thing," I said, "not to be able to place entire confidence in a person holding such a position of trust as a governess does. Might I ask in what way you found Miss Berrington's morals deficient?"

(Imagine, Carlo, my asking such a question about Junia!)

She seemed, I thought, more taken aback than the question needed. She replied, hurriedly, "I shouldn't like to say more than that, in my opinion, she was not as good as she seemed."

"Indeed! Can you give me nothing more definite?"

"Well—no." She rose as she spoke, and began to gather up her gloves, hat, and shawl. "Would you like Mr Pownall to come and see you, Maria?" she asked.

"No," was the answer; "I don't want to be prayed out of the world."

"He won't pray unless you like it."

"If he would read me something—something funny—I should like him to come. It is so dull sitting here all day, now that my eyes are so weak."

"I'll read to you now, if you like."

"I'm too tired to listen now; besides, you read too fast."

"Well, I'll tell him to come and bring

a newspaper in his pocket instead of the Prayer-book." And again the laugh grated on my ears.

A sudden thought struck me. I rose as the lady was putting on her shawl, and said, politely, "Allow me." Lifting the end of the shawl over her shoulder, I got a nearer view of her face; for, as I said, she was very tall, and I am short. I said at a venture, "Is it possible that I have the pleasure of speaking to Miss Kate Smith?"

"That was my maiden name," she said. "I am Mrs Pownall now."

"The same young lady," I said, interrogatively, "that was at Miss Clapp's school at Hammersmith, some twenty years ago?"

"Yes," she said, faintly.

Then I proceeded ruthlessly, for Junia's sake, "You will be glad to hear that your old lover, Signor Giacometti, has a thriving music-shop at Florence."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she said, haughtily; "nor do I know who you are. You must allude to some one else.

Smith is a very common name." She crossed over to where the invalid sat, kissed her hastily, with "Good-bye, Maria," and was going to quit the room when I said—

"The young lady in question had a brother named Percy — Percy Smith. He was his sister's guardian."

The invalid pricked up her ears. "What is the meaning of all this, Kate? You were at school at Hammersmith, with a Miss Clapp, were you not?"

"Of course I was; and fifty other Miss Smiths may have been there too before or after my time, for aught I know."

"But what is this about a Signor Giacometti?"

"How should I know? I never heard the name before."

"Signor Giacometti," I said, "was the singing-master, and Miss Kate Smith——" If ever I saw impotent anger and abject entreaty struggling for expression in one face, I saw it then in Mrs Pownall's; but her voice was as haughty as ever.

"Really," she said, "these old stories are no business of mine. As I tell you, I never heard of any one called Giacometti; and I am sure I never saw you before."

"Then," I said, "you cannot be the lady I knew at Miss Clapp's; for I am sure no one who had once known me would forget me." Turning to Mrs Percy Smith I said some words of regret that the object we had in view seemed at present beyond the reach of both of us. "If you happen to hear of her before I do, may I ask you to let me know?" She promised, begging me to do the same for her should I be the first to hear. I gladly assented, and took my leave. Not far from the entrance-gate the cab which was taking me back to the railway station was stopped by a sign from Mrs Pownall, who was standing at a little iron gate, that led through a shrubbery to I know not whither.

"Will you get down?" she said. "I want to speak to you."

I got down, and bid the cabman go on

slowly. We confronted each other. She did not give me time to speak, but said—

"What is your price? Name it."

"I do not know what you mean," I said. "You must explain."

"You do know what I mean, Madame Grilli!" she cried. "You know what I want. I want to buy your silence."

I said slowly, "What silence? Do you mean as to the story of Kate Smith's running away with the singing-master, and being brought back ignominiously, after a long search, by her brother?"

"It is false; and you are a cruel, hard-hearted woman!" she cried. "We had not been an hour at the hotel when Percy came and took me away."

"I know nothing about the hour at the hotel," I said. "I only know that you were missed after the singing-lesson in the morning, and that the cab which brought you back reached Miss Clapp's some time in the small hours of the night; for it was I who sat up

to let you and your brother in, at Miss Clapp's request."

She twisted her hands. She almost writhed.

"You wicked, cruel woman!" she sobbed, "to come here and rake up an old story like that, saying things that will rouse my sister-in-law's suspicions! Don't you know it was only an escapade—a mere girlish escapade? I was but seventeen, and the hateful man bewitched me with his great rolling eyes. You know that is the real truth of it all. I'm sure I wish the wretch was dead. And I wish you had been dead too before coming here to annoy me like this."

"Thanks for your candour," said I. "And now, if you please, I will proceed on my way; for I do not wish to lose the train."

But she would not let me go. She took hold of my dress; she held my hands; she almost knelt to me. "Be silent," she entreated. "I'm married now, and if my husband——" Her alarm seemed to deprive her of utterance for the moment. Then she said,

in an imploring tone, "Why should you take pleasure in making me miserable?"

She was pretty well subdued by this time, and was sobbing and weeping plentifully. So I said, "Will you be good enough to explain what you meant by those dark hints respecting Miss Berrington."

She looked up from behind her handkerchief, and replied, "I meant what I said. I don't believe her to be as good as she seems."

"That is because you are not as good as you seem, I suppose," said I. "Explain, if you please—explain."

"It doesn't matter to you—or any one—what my opinion of her is. I have a right to make it and to keep it."

"Explain," I insisted—for I was getting out of patience. "What has such an one as you to say against Junia Berrington?"

She was angry at my peremptoriness; being accustomed, doubtless, to have all that on her side exclusively. "Ah," she said, with malicious haste, "that's what you want to know?

Well, then, I've seen her kissed—by a married man too—in her own schoolroom. There! Now, Madame Grilli, what do you say to that? Is that a nice proceeding for a young lady?"

"My poor Junia!" I thought. But I said, "It depends on the young lady. If any one told me you had been treated in such a manner, I should say that you yourself were to blame. Doubtless Signor Giacometti——"

She actually stamped on the ground. "Don't name his wretched, hateful name to me!" she cried, almost beside herself with anger.

"It was merely as a precedent," I said.

She was nearly choking with rage now. "And that is not the only time," she cried. "I've seen her kissing——"

"What!" I cried in my turn. "Take care what you say."

"I mean—I've seen another man kiss her. Yes, you may stare as much as you please—I did see it. Not a hundred yards from here I saw her being kissed by a visitor at Nune-

head—a foreign nobleman. And I believe they would have eloped if she hadn't known that I was watching her."

"Pshaw!" I said. "What was the man's name?"

"Falconieri—or something like that."

I nearly laughed aloud. But all this, I remembered, may have been anything but a laughing matter for our poor Junia. I said solemnly, "Mrs Pownall"—she seemed to wince at hearing her married name—"there is a price at which you may buy my silence—that is, your ceasing at once and for ever to slander Miss Berrington, by hint, innuendo, or in any way whatever."

"Very well," she said, sullenly. "I don't care for her one way or another. It's all the same to me if I never utter her name again."

"Very good. Now, speak truly: Have you slandered her to other people, as you have to me?"

"I haven't slandered her," she said. "I may have mentioned things to one or two people—that's no slander."

"That is according to the manner of mentioning them. You will oblige me by mentioning to those one or two people to whom you have been mentioning these things, that you were entirely mistaken. That is part of my price, Mrs Pownall."

She frowned, but said, "I don't mind doing that. Though how you make me out to be mistaken I don't know. When I saw with my own eyes——"

"If you saw Marchese Falconieri kiss Miss Berrington," I said, quite out of patience, "you saw a man do what he had every right to do. He has been faithful to her for years; would have married her then, if she would have consented; would marry her to-morrow, if she would say the word. What have you to say to that?"

"Nothing," she replied, gloomily. "You keep your side of the bargain and I'll keep mine."

Without bidding each other adieu, we parted. She walked away towards the gate leading to the shrubbery; I got into the cab

and drove on, wondering at the wickedness of the world. For see how this woman has treasured up in her heart that innocent kiss of yours as an accusation against poor Junia. My dear Carlo, let us hope that the day is not far distant when she will be Marchesa Falconieri. Not a dog will dare wag his tongue against her then. But she has to be found yet.

I had written thus far when your telegram came, telling us you had found Junia and her brother, and lost them almost instantly. Paolo bids me say he will do at once as you direct; and if he can hear of her as a passenger to Canada, he will write or telegraph to you at Florence.—Your affectionate friend,

ISABELLA GRILLI.

CHAPTER XIX.

SIGNORA ISABELLA *to* SIGNOR PAOLO *in Liverpool.*

MY DEAREST HUSBAND, — You need not remain longer in Liverpool. Junia did not go with her brother to Canada, though Anna insisted so strongly that she must have done so. I have found her here in London. You must tell Carlo that I have found her, and how, for I cannot.

She is in London, engaged at a theatre which has become famous of late years, they tell me, for its burlesque representations. In a word, she is a burlesque actress, and for several years has been performing burlesque parts in the principal towns in the United Kingdom, and is now returned to London.

Thus much I have learnt without directly questioning my informant. By questioning, I could doubtless learn as many details as I chose; but I feel that I know too much already.

You were right, my Paolo, as you always are, when you said that Junia was no fit wife for Carlo Falconieri. He must never marry her. Do not let your thought run faster than my pen, Paolo *mio*. Thinking of the girl I knew at Florence, of the sad-eyed woman whom I lately met at Dittisham, I cannot bring myself to believe that the painted Venus whom I saw last night in a foolish burlesque, has ever trodden the path of infamy. To do that she must have changed her inmost nature; and what a tender, delicate, shrinking nature that was, I, her teacher, know best. Also, Paolo *mio*, when you said that she had her own secrets—that she had forgotten how to smile—may this not have been the reason of her perpetual sadness? May not this have been her secret, and the key to her unfathomable reserve and her

estrangement from Anna? When you see her, you may refuse to believe that she is the same innocent Junia whom we loved; but I must believe it, just because I cannot help doing so.

This is how I came to find out about Junia.

I had finished the work I had been doing, and not having money to spare to buy new material, besides being dull without you, I thought I would walk about and see my old haunts, and try to find out some of the people who had been kind to me when I was in England during your imprisonment in Rome. I have often talked of the goodness of a Roman woman whom I met at that time—I mean La Rainalda—she who got me a place as under-costumier at the opera-house where she was prima donna. And you must remember how, later, she took me for her maid and companion, at a salary which enabled me to put by money against that happy day when you got out of prison and escaped to Tuscany.

While I was employed as under-costumier,

I became acquainted with one of the *corps de ballet*, a girl who went by the name of Mademoiselle Berta. She was a dare-devil, harum-scarum creature, but a good girl enough, with something promising and original about her style of dancing. I was young then, and it was unutterably distasteful to me, who had never walked alone in the streets in my life, to walk more than a mile to my lodging every night after the performance was over. Finding that Berta lodged close by me, we agreed to walk home together; and we did so as long as I remained in my situation. After the opera season was over, I went with my Roman friend on a tour into the provinces, and I lost sight of Berta.

On our return, I missed her from among the ballet ladies; and, on inquiry, found that she was married and had ceased dancing. Later, I was informed that her husband drank; that he beat her; and finally, that he had died, leaving Berta with her baby, her wedding-ring, her marriage certificate; and

—a former wife came in to take possession of the corpse of the man whom Berta had supposed to be her husband, together with that husband's goods and chattels, half of which had been bought with Berta's own money. However, she was not one to allow herself to be trampled upon; and I daresay she managed to get her rights, as far as her furniture was concerned. Right to the name of wife she had none.

But she did not lose heart. She got admitted once more to the *corps de ballet*, and might have done well—for, as I said, her style was striking and original—but her baby died.

Grief, which makes most people thin, had the extraordinary effect of making Berta fat. The more she pined the fatter she grew. Before long she was dismissed from the ballet. One Saturday night she came crying to me—crying and sobbing—that she was destitute; that she, who had always been respectable, would now have to go upon the streets, for enter a workhouse she would not.

Forgive me, Paolo *mio*, for what I did when I heard this. Her words gave me a stab right through the heart. It is true, she was not *Cristiana*, but only a heretic, like all her country-people. She believed not in the Madonna, and she laughed at the sign of the cross, and only cared for being respectable. But she was a woman; and when she spoke out in her despair — saying terrible words—I went all at once, without thinking, to the place where I had my money hidden, and took out half and gave to her. And it was all done and over before I remembered that she was not a Christian like myself, but a miserable heretic—a *Protestante*—and that the money was not really mine, but yours, Paolo *mio*—saved up, penny by penny, for you only.

She was very grateful, poor thing. And I told La Rainalda about her; and she (may her soul rest!) felt interested, and spoke to many people, directors and managers, and the like; and at last poor Berta got a place of some sort in a theatre across the river, in a quarter of

which I knew nothing, and never had time to go and find out anything.

From that time till two days ago, I neither heard nor saw anything of Berta. Then, as I said in the beginning of my letter, I felt dull and lonely, and went for a walk to my old haunts; and whom should I meet coming out of a bootmaker's shop in Bow Street, but Berta, fatter than ever.

I knew her again instantly, for though her body was immense, the upper half of her face was scarcely changed. She too recognised me before I could speak. She took hold of me in the street and hugged me almost as if she had been an Italian, laughing and crying because she was so glad to see me. When she had calmed down a little, we walked together to an eating-house in the Strand, where she insisted on giving me my dinner. And a very good one it was too—so much better than my usual fare that I remonstrated. But she silenced me, saying that had it not been for my kindness she would have been in the river years ago. She was very communicative;

told me all about her money, how much she had saved, and how she had been swindled out of it, and had lost nearly everything. However, she was not in low spirits, for she said that she was on the road to make a fortune greater than the one she had lost. It was then that she mentioned the name of Angela Gabrielli, a former pupil of hers, with whom she was shortly to make a tour round the world. "She has been ill, and has fallen off lately in her good looks, but she is of a build that is not to be met with every day," said Berta. "When she is made up for the evening I'll defy any one to produce a handsomer girl in England." With that she pulled out some photographs, and bid me judge for myself. I looked at the photographs, and felt myself turn cold. When I could speak —which was not for a minute—I asked whether this person was an Italian. Berta (who, it seems, calls herself Mrs Marville) replied that she was not; but that she spoke Italian perfectly, she believed. At any rate she was in the habit of talking to herself in a language

that sounded very like what she used to hear me speak when I was talking to the foreigners at the opera. I asked what was her English name.

Berta hesitated. "I know she likes her English name to be kept quiet. But as you are not English, I suppose it does not matter. Her name is Berrington."

I asked no more. I went home and prayed upon my knees that it might not be our Junia. But Berta had given me a ticket for that night's performance, and I went, and saw the horrid truth with my own eyes. I weep to think of her: our Junia, so beautiful, so innocent-looking, so like, with the fictitious white and red on her face, to what she was when you and I taught her at Florence. I think you would weep too could you see her. I wish for my part that she looked less lovely —I cannot wish that she should look less innocent.

O Paolo *mio!* if my woman's instinct might but prevail with you for a moment! Remember that she is English, not Italian;

heretic, not Catholic (though that, alas! will not weigh with you); yet let this excuse her, if it may. Let anything excuse her—I care not what—so that you think her not infamous.

But whatever she may be—the woman, the beauty of whose form, the length of whose hair, the whiteness of whose arms,—ay, the quality and meaning of whose smile, have been the subjects of a thousand Englishmen's idle chatter,—this is not the woman to whom Carlo should give the title of Marchesa Falconieri.

And, feeling this the more now that I have written what was in my heart, I entreat you to leave Liverpool at once, so as to be here to meet Carlo, in case he should have quitted Florence before he receives a letter from you; for I confess that I know not how to bear the ordeal of meeting him alone, after seeing Junia act Venus last night.—Your most devoted wife, ISABELLA.

CHAPTER XX.

OUTSIDE the gallery entrance of the "Royal Amalgamated" a crowd was standing, expectant, not impatient as yet. According to the yellow play-bills, there were to be had at this theatre for a limited number of nights, two entirely novel and unprecedented sensations.

Inside the theatre, behind the stage, various scenes were being enacted. For instance: Mrs Bunce, rubbing her right cheek thoughtfully with a hare's foot, belonging to Junia, was saying, "It is exactly a year ago to-night that I buried my baby!"

For which unseasonable speech she was instantly shaken by Mrs Marville.

"You little fool, you little idiot! can't you hold your tongue?" cried that energetic woman. "Who wants to know when your

baby was buried? Business is business—and you mind yours, and don't forget all your cues, as you did last night." Mrs Marville had just unpacked her thunderbolt (for she was going to dress for the part of Jupiter, in the "Tiff in High Life"). In her agitation she flourished the gilded weapon in a way that was more vehement than comic.

Mrs Bunce began to whimper. "How you do startle a body! Anyhow, what I said was true; and if you bully me, ma'am, I'll speak to my husband."

"Oh, you're a nice one, you are!" the other hissed. "Speak to him, that's all; and to Australia with me you'll not go—no, nor to America either, not if I'd signed twenty times. Where's the medicine-bottle I gave you to take care of?"

A voice came from a corner: "Dear old woman, don't tease Mrs Bunce." It was Junia who spoke.

Everybody in the ladies' dressing-room looked round. Those farthest off whispered to the others, "What did she say?"

"My angel!" Mrs Marville cried, "I won't say another word to her if you don't like. Drink this, my love, my beauty; it will do you good, and keep you up, the doctor said. There's such a house—such a house to-night, lovey; and you are looking—oh, so beautiful, my lovey dear!"

Junia drank the potion, saying, as she gave the glass back, "I cannot bear this much longer. If I do not hear to-night, to-morrow I shall go to Liverpool and see the agents. I wonder why they have not written."

"Perhaps there will be a letter to-night," Mrs Marville said, with feigned sprightliness. "Nothing more likely, I should say. And now, my pet, don't think about letters—think about your part. You are looking lovely. Won't you bring the house down, that's all!"

A general sigh of relief burst forth from the occupants of the dressing-room when the door had closed on Mrs Marville and Junia. One and another declared that they would sooner see a ghost in broad daylight than see Gabrielli look like that.

"Ah, you may say that," said Mrs Bunce, with tears trickling over her rouge.

Loitering about, on and off the stage, were two men dressed as sailors. The ladies and gentlemen who were to go on in the first act were ready dressed, and all were engaged in staring at these new performers. The new performers were doubly engaged in tobacco-chewing and in staring back at them. Their stare was the stare of tyros—a mixture of desperate shyness and trembling audacity. Like other tyros, it might be judged from their dress that they felt their make-up to be all-important; that they staked their reputation on their appearance, having nought else to stake it on. No such clothes as these ever came out of the wardrobe of the "Royal Amalgamated." Their folds and creases were distinctive, unmistakable; the very flavour of the sea clung to them, and half told their tale.

The low comedian crossed over and said to one of the sailors, "What will you sell me that suit of clothes for, just as it is?"

The sailor shifted his quid, and the two

began bargaining. But before the matter was half settled, the bell rang, the curtain went up, and the low comedian dashed on as Mercury on his way to his temple.

On the left were Mrs Marville and Junia, ready to go on as Jupiter and Venus in the second scene.

"Jemmy, Jemmy, where are you?" Mrs Marville said. "Please" (to a super) "tell Mr Bunce that I want to speak to him at once."

Jemmy, dressed as Vulcan (but without the Vulcanic limp), came up in a moment. "Did you want me, ma'am?" he inquired, with a covert glance at Junia, who was leaning against the wall, and staring into vacancy.

Mrs Marville followed the direction of his eyes, and with a nod she said, taking him aside, "Jemmy, my dear, good soul, if ever she's done you a good turn, you do her one now, I beg and pray of you. Keep those sailor men away, Jemmy, my dear. Don't let her see them, for the Lord's sake, or I won't answer for the consequences. It's as much as her life's worth, if she sees them, and

hears where they come from. It's been champagne and opiates, and opiates and champagne, ever since she heard the news. Drat those nasty shipwrecked sailors," said Mrs Marville, with a burst of grief. "And drat the governor too, I say."

"Business is business, ma'am," said Jemmy, with a mournful shake of the head; "but it wrings a man's heart when anything like this occurs." And up went Vulcan's hammer to his eye to hide a genuine tear. For Jemmy was a tender-hearted creature, and had a dog-like devotion to Junia. "I'll do my best. I'd do anything for her, as you know, Mrs Marville. I shall never forget her kindness to my wife last year, when our baby died," said poor Vulcan, lachrymose.

"Bless you, Jemmy; I know you will." And with a sigh Jupiter went back to Venus, still leaning woe-begone against the wall, gazing on vacancy.

On the other side, the two men in the sailors' dress were the nucleus of attraction to an increasing but constantly-shifting crowd

of actors, actresses, carpenters, supers; every man, every woman in the theatre not actually on duty became one of this band of listeners to a tale of horror that was all true; to an act in a tragedy of real life; a tale of the all-devouring sea.

Into their midst came the scene-shifters with the stage-manager after them. There was a chorus of "Out of the way there!" and the crowd dispersed, as at the reading of the Riot Act, to re-form on the other side. Mrs Marville, Jemmy Bunce, and Junia presently entered. Mrs Marville muttered to Jemmy, "I could sit down and cry my eyes out, if that would do her any good. But what is one to do, Jemmy? One must live. There won't be much more of this, that's one comfort. Perhaps the sea voyage will do her good. If she dies before this engagement is over, I shall feel that I'm her murderer."

"You mustn't give way to low spirits, ma'am. If anything could do you—or her—good, 'twould be to see what a house there is to-night."

"Yes, but that's partly because of those horrid sailors. I call it a most illegitimate sensation; and their tarry, fusty clothes, that smell so! The governor ought to be ashamed of himself."

"There's not legitimate sensation left, ma'am. It ain't the governor that's to blame, but the public, in my opinion."

"I don't care who's to blame. I only know it's a shame. Where's my thunderbolt?" To Junia, "Angel, darling, where are you? Our scene is coming on in a minute, my love. Would you like me to prompt you? How's your head, lovey?"

"Is there an early train to Liverpool?" asks poor Junia, only half lulled by the opiate. "I must be there—on the spot. Some boat will have picked June up; and he is a good swimmer. I told you he was a good swimmer, did I not?"

"She'll break my heart," says Mrs Marville to herself. But Jemmy Bunce springs suddenly from an unknown quarter with "There's our cue! Come along, Venus."

The public applauds, full-throated. The scene goes on, laughter and applause mingling. At the end, Venus is recalled unanimously, and appears, to be greeted by a shower of bouquets.

"Curtsey," Vulcan whispers, as he hobbles forward to the foot-lights, holding Venus by the hand. She obeys.

"Look up and smile," he prompts. And again she obeys, and again applause breaks forth full-throated.

All this while the presses are at work printing the last new leaders, the last new murders, the last new sensations, legitimate and otherwise. Here was one, safe to carry a morning paper through two editions :—

"We are informed, on reliable authority, that one of the passengers in the ill-fated America was a near relative of the talented lady whose services have been secured for a short time only by Mr Fitzhenry Scraggs, manager of the 'Royal and National Amalgamated,' for the performance of the character of Venus in the original burlesque, 'A Tiff

in High Life.' Miss Angela Gabrielli appeared in this arduous character for the fourth time on Tuesday, and played to an enthusiastic and crowded audience. There were, however, some very slight traces of unsteadiness in her acting, and an absence of the vivacity so necessary to the effectual rendering of the famous squabbling duet, which we forbear to criticise, in deference to the report which heads this paragraph, and which we shall sincerely rejoice to find untrue. The enterprising and spirited manager of this theatre has engaged two of the small band of survivors of the ill-fated America to appear between the acts of the 'Tiff in High Life.' It may be said that these weather-beaten votaries of Neptune fairly divide the honours of recognition with the lovely Venus, who responds to her nightly recalls with a reluctance which reminds us rather of a coy wood-nymph than of the Paphian goddess. The cestus and other jewels with which Miss Angela Gabrielli adorns her unique impersonation are supplied by the best Parisian

firm for stage-jewellery, and are valued at £800."

In the first page of the 'News' was an advertisement, read, and curiously commented on, by some hundreds of thousands of people over the family breakfast-table. It was headed thus:—

"LOSS OF THE AMERICA.

"If this should meet the eye of Miss Junia Berrington, or of Marchese Carlo Falconieri, they (or their friends) are earnestly requested to communicate with Percy Smith, Esq., at Nunehead Park, near Atherly, ——shire."

This uncle Odynell saw, and Anna Calvert, and Signora Isabella, and Mrs Marville. This was what caught the eye of Carlo at the Victoria railway station, when he got out of the train from Dover that morning.

But Mrs Marville hid it from Junia. "For," she said, "it will be something about her brother, perhaps; and she must be kept up, somehow, till after her benefit night."

CHAPTER XXI.

ONCE again Carlo steps on the threshold of that dainty boudoir in Grosvenor Square, where he had seen Anna sitting with her two boys at her knee, half Madonna, half queen. But Anna is dethroned, and a worthier is in her place.

Stretched on a couch lies a tall form, whose garments are not whiter than her face. Many a day has Carlo stood and looked, and never yet has he won recognition from lip or eye. To-day, perhaps, it is the June sunshine which peeps through the gossamer curtains; perhaps it is the touch of love that is rekindling her poor fainting life—who knows?—but she stirs to-day, and says, just under her breath, "Carlo!"

Instantly he is on his knees beside her, with her hands in his.

"Carlo! are we in Florence?"

"Not yet, Junia, *carissima;* not yet."

"It seemed like Florence: so quiet, and a bird singing somewhere. I thought it was your nightingale."

It was but a sparrow's twittering; no nightingale's song at all. But everything was too new and strange to Junia yet. Had any one told her even yesterday that she was in Grosvenor Square; that her aunt and her uncle, her brother-in-law and her sister, various doctors, and Carlo Falconieri, were all supremely interested in her, she would have wept, thinking she was mocked.

But the time and the scene were indeed changed for Junia.

Enter an immense footman, carrying champagne and biscuits on a tray. Enter likewise Mrs Odynell in black silk trimmed with crape, voluminous and rustling, bearing a mourning fan, black-tasselled, all correct. Enter also Anna, small, meek, subdued in spirit, but

desirous as ever to do her duty and make things pleasant all round. Anna's bed has been anything but a bed of roses of late. Her best intentions have been spoken ill of; her best motives have been misconstrued. Uncle Odynell has reproached her almost bitterly for not telling him about Junia years ago. She had refused his help before, true : she was of an independent nature, true : wilful, headstrong, not easy to lead. "She may have been all that, and more, but she was my niece, and I was fond of her, and you ought to have given me the chance of doing something for her," said uncle Odynell, with tears trickling down his poor old cheeks.

This was said one day when Junia was worse, and Mr Calvert, who had been dividing his time between Grosvenor Square and Longbeach, had come, in answer to a telegram from Mr Odynell. To be blamed like this, before her husband, was more than Anna could bear.

"What would have been the good of my giving you the chance, as you call it?" Anna

asked. "She wrote to you herself, and asked you to take her in; and you sent her letter back unanswered."

"I never had any such letter from her. That is quite a mistake of yours, Anna."

"It is not a mistake, uncle. I asked her myself why she had not gone to you, because I felt so sure you would have helped her; and she said her letter had been returned. So what was to be done?"

"I never had it — I never had it," Mr Odynell repeated.

"She told me it had been opened, and returned. And the envelope was in aunt Odynell's handwriting."

Mr Odynell stood up. "Calvert, I give you my sacred word of honour that I never knew of Junia having written me that letter."

"I quite believe you, Mr Odynell," Mr Calvert replied.

"Good God! to think of the child having written to me for help, and having her letter returned! It's atrocious — it's atrocious. Anna, my dear, I beg your pardon for what

I said just now. I ought not to have said it, my dear."

"Don't think anything more about it, uncle, please."

"Think!—I must think. Calvert, you had never seen her then. You don't know what a lovely girl she was. And her letter to be returned! I feel as if I had been stabbed!" He hid his face in his hands for a moment and groaned. Then raising his head, said solemnly: "Calvert, for eight-and-twenty years my life has been a martyrdom—eight-and-twenty years." With these words he left the room.

Anna felt sorry for him; but she felt, too, that it was better that he should bear his own sins, instead of making a scapegoat of her. If he had had proper spirit and proper family feeling, years ago, all these things which had happened would not have happened. But at all events, there would be no more saying to her, "Why did you do this, or why did you not do that?"

Mr Calvert did not speak for a moment. Then he said, "Poor uncle Odynell!"

"You may well say 'poor uncle Odynell,'" Anna repeated.

"Yes; he is a man greatly to be pitied. But, Anna dear, how was it you did not tell me? I should have been so glad to have helped your poor sister."

"O Cyril! you blaming me too!" said Anna, with tears.

"No, my dear. How could you think that? I mean no blame to you."

"If I had only known you then as well as I do now! But I did not really know you. I could not tell what you would think. And Junia would not do as I advised, and I had nobody to advise me. I could not trust uncle, or ask him anything after knowing about that letter. Of course if we had been married it would have been so different. I should have told you everything." There Anna stopped, fearing she had said too much already.

"But, my dear, I am not blaming you. Pray understand me now. I only meant what I said, my dear: that it was a pity I didn't know all about it, because I might have been such a help to that poor thing. That is all, my dear. I am sorry you should be so distressed. Of course I know you acted for the best."

Anna might well sigh at words like these. She felt them more than the bitterest reproaches her husband could have uttered. Truly there seemed to be something wrong in the world: something irreclaimably crooked and perverse, which no wise act nor horrid word could coax straight. Anna felt it very hard upon her that things should turn out so. For had she not always tried to do right? And why should her right turn out wrong?

Nor was Mrs Odynell backwards with her pin-prick.

"Ah!" she said—not sparing her words because of Anna's devotion in helping her through her burdensome social duties,—"if June had not been so headstrong, he would

have been a respectable clergyman now, doing his duty in his parish, instead of perishing in that dreadful way. And Junia upheld him in his wilfulness. Ah! they were a wilful pair—one as bad as the other. And see what has come of it!" said aunt Odynell, with a wave of her fan and a shake of her head.

All this was terribly hard to bear. Anna longed to tell her aunt the plain truth, as she had told it to uncle Odynell. But that was a thing not to be undertaken even by the most venturesome. Anna bore with all this till she could bear no longer; and then she fled back to the quiet parsonage at Longbeach, and its parish work, and the poor people who adored her, and thought no one in the world so wise and so good as the "parson's wife."

It was Carlo who told Junia all that there was to know of the loss of the America and her living freight. No one else dared tell her. Carlo, in his love for her, found courage to do it.

Mr Percy Smith was the only first-class passenger saved from the America. There

were some sailors in a boat (of which two had already been swamped); and just as they were putting off a cry rose, "There is room for one more!" One man—young, with a beautiful face and bright blue eyes—was in the act of springing, when a white despairing face thrust itself forwards, entreating to be let fill the vacant place; for he was a married man, he said—he had a wife and family at home. The young man drew back. "I am not married," he said; and drawing from his breast two letters, bid him to whom he gave his place send them to their owners if he survived. These letters were addressed to Junia Berrington and to Carlo Falconieri—unfinished both, and only identified by the context and the handwriting.

So June Berrington died, that Percy Smith might live.

"I always wished June to be a hero," Junia said, softly; "and my wish is answered; and my heart is broken."

Many days after, Carlo said, "June left you to me, and bade me love you and care for

you. And he wrote that you loved me too. Is it so?"

"Yes," was all Junia said.

But Mrs Odynell, when she heard that they were to be married, was instantly in a hurry and bustle. Carlo had settled, in his own mind, that he would ask Mr Calvert to come up and marry them quietly in Mrs Odynell's boudoir; but Mrs Odynell ruled otherwise.

"Cyril may assist, of course," she said; "but the Bishop of St Magnus must marry you. I know he will do anything to oblige *me*."

And the Bishop of St Magnus did it.

CHAPTER XXII.

Was Junia happy?

That was what Signora Isabella took anxious pains to ascertain, when she and Signor Paolo returned to Florence, six months after the bride and bridegroom. It was she who, in her meddlesomeness, had first helped to transplant this poor storm-stricken plant into love's garden; and though, in her haste, she had afterwards said to Paolo that Junia the actress was no fitting mate for such an one as Carlo Falconieri, yet she quickly repented of her haste when she saw that Carlo, though he might accuse circumstances, never once accused Junia, but looked upon her as the innocent victim of other people's sins and fears and mistakes. Love, then, would be lord of all, and Carlo most godlike of men. After

untold sorrow would come untold bliss. For to love all things are possible.

Therefore Junia ought to be happy. But the signora was compelled to ask herself, Could a woman be happy who never smiled? What wish of hers had Carlo left ungratified? Had not Mrs Marville retired on a pension which might well make her declare that it was a blessed day for her when she brought back to life the girl whom Carlo loved?

If Junia was not happy, it was her own fault. If she had the will, she would surely have the power to forget all that in her life which was not pleasant to remember. And so the signora began to look upon Carlo as an ill-used being, and to read in him the signs of a disappointed man.

"And she does not seem to take an interest in the public affairs which interest him so much," the signora thought. "It is a wife's duty to pretend to be, even if she cannot feel, interested in what interests her husband. How little Paolo thinks that half he says is as an unknown tongue to me, though we have

been married so many years! And she does not seem to care for being Marchesa Falconieri! She seems to care for nothing except sitting silent in the loggia, and looking at the sky as if she were reading a puzzle there. 'I want to be quiet,' she says. She forgets that, now she has married Carlo Falconieri, she belongs to Italy. Carlo Falconieri's wife ought not to wish to be quiet."

Thus ran the signora's dissatisfied thought, when, instead of an Eden, she believed she had found a desert.

But was Carlo a disappointed man? Let a page of his diary show :—

"I can look back now, and see what it was I strove for. I have tasted a passionate joy. Now I have the after bitterness. A year ago she said, 'Take me, if you think me worth the having. Take me, knowing what I have been, and what I hoped to be, and what I am.'

"I took her. At last my boyish dream was a magnificent reality. She was a wreck, they said. They should have seen her with my eyes. I took her as I might have taken a

crown. She was mine by the power of constancy. Like the vain conqueror who crowned himself, I said, '*Dieu me l'a donnée; gare à qui la touche.*'

"O thorny circlet, iron-bound. It presses heavier every day, and eats into my brain. And yet it is not because I do not love her; rather because of my love; for I doubt, in spite of myself, whether my love has not taken possession of her a day too late, poor victim that she is of the world's unkindness.

"Yet she loves me, I know. Why does she not show sympathy with my work, which is heavy and discouraging? I cannot go to Paolo for sympathy now that I have my wife, still less to Signora Isabella.

"I wish sometimes, when I see her twisting the gold ring round her finger, which grows thinner every day, that I could take it off, throw it into the Arno, and say, 'Go, my love; be free.' Does she wish that, I wonder? when she sits so, looking from her loggia seat, with hands locked together—pale

thin hands, that look as if a man's strong clasp might crush them?

"Should I have given her time to think—time to feel the want of me?

"Love, if I could set you free, would you come back to me? If I went away, would the quiet of the old house be too quiet? Should I hear you call, 'Carlo mine, where are you?'"

A week later.—"To-day, while we were driving in the Cascine, my wife heard a ballad sung which she had sung herself when a girl, and bade the coachman drive in the direction of the singer. As we drew near, I recognised her as a denizen of the lowest quarter in Florence. I saw, too, that the servants in attendance recognised her, not as I did, as belonging merely to a class, but personally. '*Che!* it is La Ciccina, your ladyship,' Beppo turned round and said, when Junia bade him stop, because she wanted to speak to the woman. I called to him to drive on, saying to Junia in English, that it was not needful to stop for such *canaglia* as that.

"She was disappointed. She wished, she said, to give her something, and to know what she was, and where she came from.

"I said, 'Give her what you please, but I do not wish the carriage stopped. I know where she comes from—from the back slums of the city.'

"'But how came she there? That is what I want to know!'

"'Born there, I daresay.' And throwing a piece of money to the girl, I cried to Beppo again to drive on.

"Junia turned red. My piece of money hit the creature full in the face, then fell on the ground. I felt sorry for even such a small discourtesy, for the creature was a woman after all; but I tried to make light of it, saying, 'Depend upon it, she would like to be hit in the face every day with a good *francescone* like that!'

"But Junia said, 'O Carlo *mio*, why do you speak with scorn of her, because she sings in the streets to get her bread? It is all chance which has put her there and me

here. I should not have liked money to be thrown in my face had I been a street singer. Carlo, it hurts me that you should despise the poor. And — she may be one of God's little ones.'

"'I do not despise the poor,' I said; 'but you know not what you are talking of, Junia. That woman is not an honest woman, I am sure.'

"She said, half to herself, 'Some people said I was not an honest woman; and perhaps they believed it too.' And I knew she was weeping behind her veil.

"Afterwards, I found that she had sent for the woman, and had had a long talk with her. She told me about her, saying, that if ever she were able to work, her work should be among such as these, the scorn and off-scouring of the world.

"Perhaps if Junia could forget every incident in her life before she married me, we might both be happier."

Ten days later.—"After having fallen into

abeyance for more than a year, the scheme proposed is really to be put into execution. Government sends five Commissioners to Sardinia to report upon the state of the country, the alleged increase of malaria, and the agricultural prospects generally. This morning I saw the Minister of Agriculture. He asked me whether I was come to decline the post. Two of the Commissioners named last year have already cried off, on account of their precious health and their wives and families. I set his mind at rest on that point. The more work I do just now the better for me. If the work take me into a new place, better still.

"Junia takes the news of my approaching departure very quietly. She supposes that I shall be absent some time. 'Are you afraid of the sea?' she asked; and when I said that I was not, she seemed satisfied.

"Well, you said once that only incapables need die, so I will work. You said a year ago that you wanted to be quiet. It is only

I who bring the world's turmoil into Casa Falconieri. When I am gone all will be quiet enough. Perhaps one day I may become tired of the strife which pleases me now, and I may come back gladly and find peace with you in the old house."

CHAPTER XXIII.

A GOVERNMENT steamer lay in the little harbour of Porto Torris; two boats were putting off to the shore, containing their Commissioners, their servants, and their luggage.

Presently the little inn was in a ferment; every available fowl was being killed for the restoration of the illustrious valets and their most illustrious masters. Porto Torris itself was in a state of frantic delight, and there was talk of an illumination to the Commissioners. For Porto Torris is loyal, and were not these the men who had seen the King?

The weather had been bad, and their Excellencies—as a body—were hungry men. But Carlo, who had travelled more than

most of them, was speedily satisfied, and, escaping from table long before the general repast was over, ordered coffee and a guide to the Roman ruins. The guide came, but was obstinate in the matter of guidance. Why should his Excellency desire to look at old stones when the Leghorn steamer was coming in? But Carlo signified a firm intention of viewing the ruins, and walked on in what he supposed to be the right direction, leaving the guide to follow or not, as he pleased.

He found what he sought, and made a slight sketch, to be enclosed in the letter he would presently send to his wife. He was returning to Porto Torris, when a violent gust of wind and sudden rain forced him to take shelter under a doorway. While there he discovered that his pencil-case was missing, and returned to search for it at the spot where he had sat down to make the sketch. Blown onwards by the wind, he was glad to stop and take breath, leaning against a broken wall which interposed its shelter between him

and the storm, now coming inland. As he stood under the lee of the wall, a carriage passed, then stopped; and his truant guide got down from beside the coachman and ran towards him, declaring with many low bows and much simulated anxiety, that he had been seeking his Excellency everywhere. Then, running back to the carriage, he opened the door and assisted, first Signora Isabella, then Junia, in their descent.

"What madness is this?" was all Carlo could say. They had evidently just disembarked from the steamer. Their cloaks and veils, even Junia's hair, were wet with the salt spray.

"She insisted on coming, and I was obliged to come and take care of her," said Signora Isabella, in a tone of apology.

They drove back together to the inn. There the signora left them to order rooms and refreshment. As soon as they were alone Carlo said, "My love, why did you do this mad thing? Do you not know that you are

endangering your precious life? Even this town is unhealthy—full of malaria."

"I come," she said, her lips trembling like that of a child who is rebuked, "because of what Signor Paolo said. I had long thought—from his manner—that he disapproved of me, and now I know it. But I am not going to believe that he knows your mind better than I know it." She trembled, and was very pale; and Carlo made her sit down, and sat down himself beside her.

"My poor love," he said, taking her hand, "why cannot we be let alone? What mischief has been made now?"

"Then you are not angry with me?"

"I am very angry that any one should put such a thing into your head. I should not have expected this from Paolo."

"He meant well. Do not be angry with him, Carlo, for he thinks so much of you—I understood that. And he is soured from disappointment, too, because he fears now that Rome will never be the capital. But I cannot

be scolded by any one except you, Carlo. And it is not true, as he said"—she began to weep—"that I am a bad wife to you, and that you went away because you were so weary of the death-in-life at Casa Falconieri. He said that I did not do my duty as became a Marchesa Falconieri, and that you were glad to go. Carlo, if you think me wanting in duty to you and your position, show me the way to do rightly; but do not let any one blame me except you, love."

"If you had written to me of this I would have returned instantly," said Carlo.

"I tried, but I could not write. It broke my heart to hear it, and I could only make haste and come after you, and hear you say that you were not tired of me because I was always sad and quiet and still, as he said. I shall not be sad by-and-by, I think. And I could not ask you to return. What would the Florentines — the Opposition — have said? They would have laughed at the Marchese tied to the apron of his English wife."

"My wise Junia!" Carlo tried to smile. "But if my coming back had removed a cause of uneasiness from your mind, I should not have cared what they said."

"It could not have been so," she rejoined, with a touch of her old spirit. "You went away to serve Italy. It was my place to come after you if I wanted you. And I have come."

"You will have to go back," he said, regretfully. "I may expose my own life, but I dare not expose yours."

But she laid her head on his shoulder, and told him, laughing low, that she would not go back. "See what it was to have an English wife!" she said. "An Italian woman would have stayed at home when her husband bade her; but an Englishwoman followed her husband, even across the sea."

"Only love me a little longer, as you have loved me this long while, and I shall be all and do all that you can wish; for your love stands between me and a toilsome and diffi-

cult past. Soon, I think, the door will be quite shut upon it, and no old memories will come to embitter my life."

"If I could but make you forget everything that happened to you before I married you!" said Carlo.

"But then I should forget how long you had loved me."

"True, love—true."

"I have sat on the loggia for hours together, silent and idle. Dull, you thought, perhaps. But all the time I have been asking myself 'Why?' I have prayed—yes—prayed in an agony—to know the meaning of my life. And—I begin to hope now, that God will tell me all I want to know—by-and-by. So I can wait patiently till He does, and live on, a new life with you, my Carlo. If you are content with me that is all I care for. For not even June himself loved me better than you do. And you—I came over the sea after you. Is that love enough?"

"It is more than enough," he said.

Her head lay heavier on his shoulder, and she murmured that she was happy. He did not move, thinking that, worn out by fatigue, she had fallen asleep.

It was dusk when a knock was heard at the door, and Signora Isabella entered with a servant carrying lights.

"Hush!" said Carlo; "she is asleep."

THE END.

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